



THE **MARVEL** ART OF

GEORGE PÉREZ



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INTRODUCTION

BY KURT BUSIEK



Not long ago, as I write this, there was a poll/meme/whatever-you-want-to-call-it on Twitter, asking people for their best memory of getting something in the mail. I didn't really have an answer to that—I've gotten lots of cool stuff in the mail, from contracts to royalties to international airline tickets—but one of the things that came immediately to mind was *Avengers* #147 for a few reasons.

For one, I was a big *Avengers* fan and was particularly enjoying the Kang/Squadron Supreme/Serpent Crown epic that was running in the book at the time. For another, I'd made a terrible, terrible mistake just a few months earlier.

I was 15 years old and had only been reading comics regularly for a couple of years. And I'd fallen prey to a subscription ad that had promised to send all the issues *direct to my house* at a substantial savings that was attractive to my paper-route-fueled finances. But what I didn't know when I'd sent in that hard-earned subscription money was that subscriber copies arrived a few weeks *after* the books hit the comics shop racks. So week after week, I'd go to my local comics store—the Million Year Picnic in Cambridge, Massachusetts—and pick up the books I *hadn't* subscribed to, while I looked at the ones I had already paid for just sitting there on the shelves, tempting me. Calling to me. But I had to wait.

And, man, *Avengers* #147 was hard to wait for. I don't think I've ever waited for anything quite so aggressively. Because the story had already been delayed—it was supposed to happen in #145 and was even promoted as such in the *Comic Reader* and maybe even in Marvel house ads, so I'd been seeing the cover for months and was already completely hooked by the story. I wanted to read it *so* much.

And for all that the story and the delay had me keyed up, another big reason for my anticipation was that the comic was drawn by George Pérez.

I don't remember where I first saw George's work. I'd missed his "Sons of the Tiger" work in *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* and his run on "Man-Wolf" in *Creatures on the Loose*. It might have been *Inhumans* #1 in July 1975. Or it might have been a month later in *Avengers* #141.

Certainly, *Avengers* was where I first took note of George.

I mean, I'd liked his predecessors on the book just fine since I'd started reading it. But right from his first issue, George brought a new electricity to it, an energy and enthusiasm that marked it as something special that said, "Hey, look at this!" Lots of panels, each of them bringing new nuggets of action, excitement, characterization, conflict...the intensity of the book just kinda cranked up once George arrived and set a tone for the series that's rarely been equaled.

It certainly blew my teenage mind and solidified *Avengers*' position as one of my absolute favorite series (along with *X-Men*, *Defenders* and a couple of others). So it was agony to

wait for that issue. I remember haunting the front door every day, waiting for the mailman to bring me *something*, and when the issue arrived, I didn't even go upstairs to my room but read it—at least twice—on our side porch.

This was the stuff. This was my personal nirvana in the summer of 1976.

I was not only hooked on *Avengers*, but I loved what followed, with George's work on *Fantastic Four*, *Logan's Run*, *Marvel Two-In-One*...and I caught up on those earlier series I'd missed. George was simply too good not to follow, whatever he was doing.

Six years later, I was a professional comics writer. And George was off making history over at DC. And fifteen years after that, I was offered *Avengers* as a regular assignment...and with George drawing it.

I still find it hard to believe. *Avengers* had been, thanks to the work of George and others (John Buscema, Steve Englehart, Roy Thomas, John Byrne, Jim Shooter, Neal Adams...), my idea of the prime Marvel series, the spine that the whole Marvel Universe was shaped around. And I'd never really dreamed of writing it. It was too big a book.

(The book I dreamed of was *Iron Man*, which I was also offered. So it was a good year.)

But writing *Avengers* was an amazing thrill. And getting to partner up with George...?

It was nirvana all over again. Because George brought all that electricity, all that energy and enthusiasm I'd responded to as a teenager (and all those tiny panels too!) to our run, as if he was as fresh and excited as he'd been in the 1970s.

And that was because, as I learned pretty quickly, he *was* as fresh and excited as ever. George has never rested on his laurels—he's always brought his full energy and skill to everything he's done. And I couldn't have asked for a better creative partner.

For all his power, for all his years of experience, George is also one of the nicest guys ever to pick up a pencil, and it was even more of a treat to write the book with him drawing it than it was to read it on that side porch, all those years ago.

I still have that now-battered issue of *Avengers* and so much of what's come since, and I treasure it all. And now you get a tour through George's Marvel career yourself—albeit a little faster than mine was—and get to take it all in via this deluxe volume.

I'm confident this book and the art within will be a valued treasure and thrill you as much as it has me. And best of all...

...you won't have to wait for that @#\$%& mailman!

Kurt Busiek
August 2020



CHAPTER ONE

ROBOTS & TIGERS & WEREWOLVES, OH MY!

“All of them.”

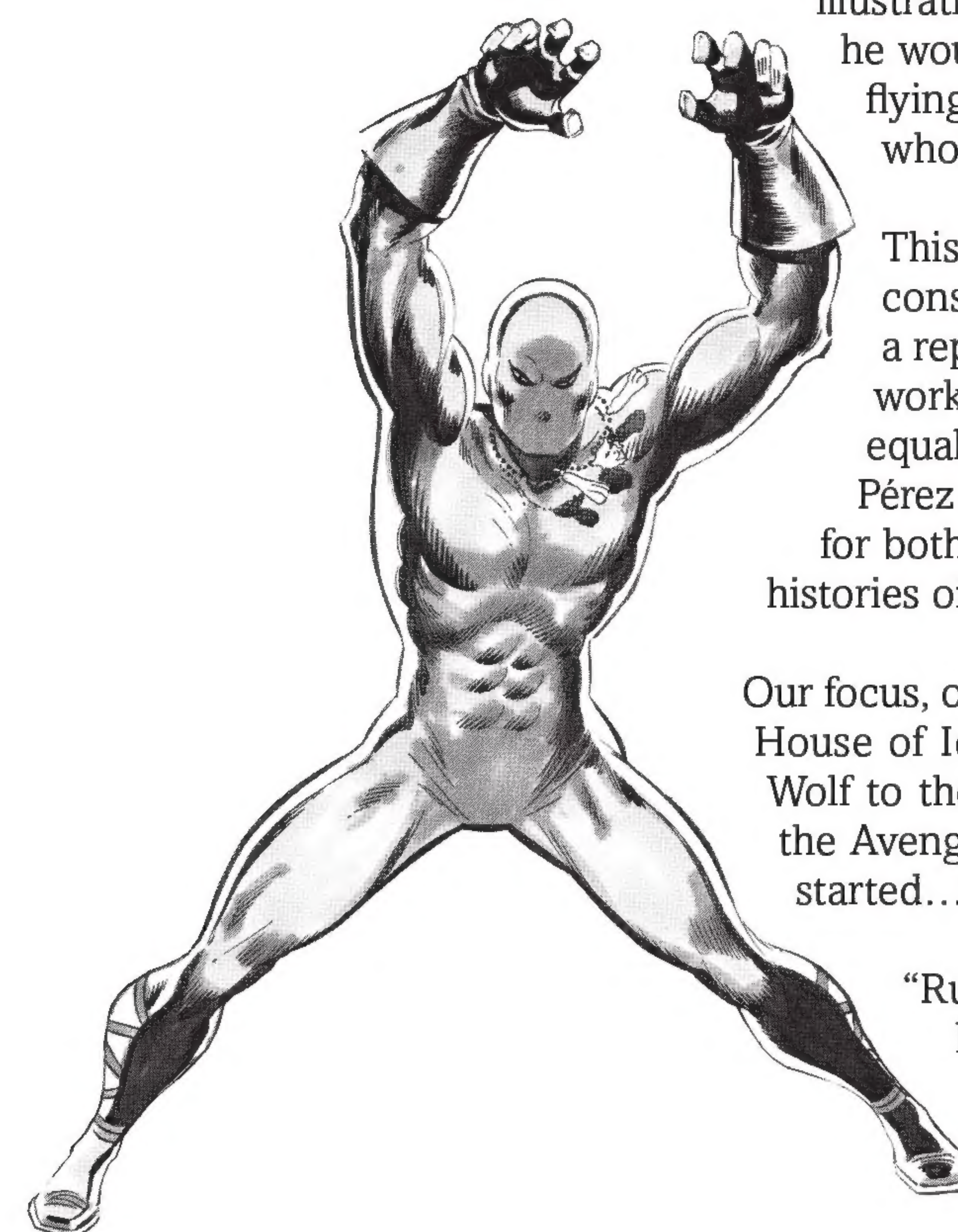
From the first moment that young George Pérez learned of the existence of comic book super heroes, that is what he wanted to draw: every single one. Years later, he would regularly be asked by writers on each new project which characters he would like to use. His inevitable answer? “All of them.” And, time and time again—whether he was illustrating the Avengers, the Justice League, or even both at the same time—he would even find a way to feature these armies of costumed adventurers, flying, charging, *interacting*, on a single cover, page, or spread. Capturing whole universes in one image became the Pérez hallmark.

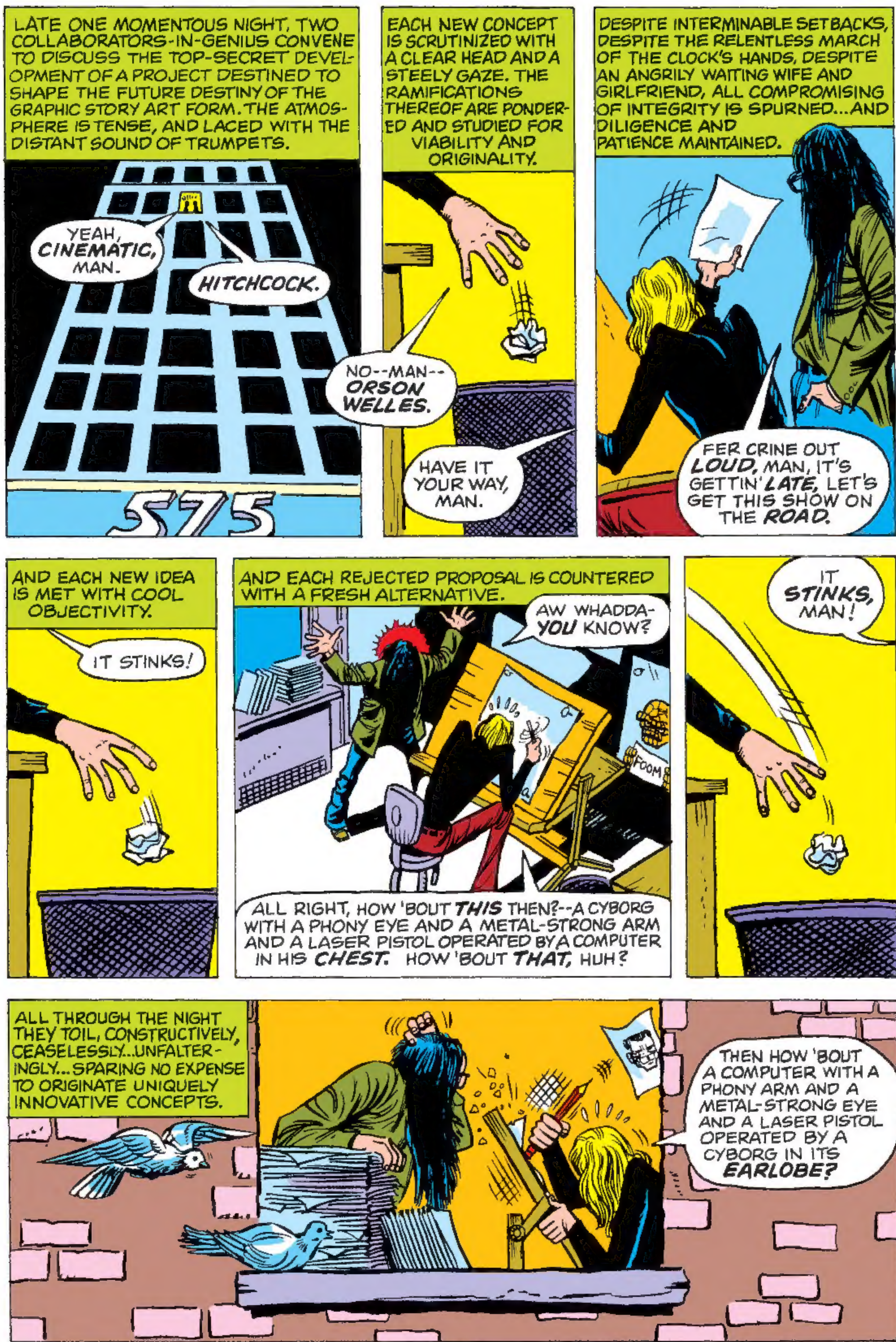
This all-or-nothing philosophy drove him on through a professional career of constant self-improvement that stretched across five decades, earning him a reputation as one of the hardest working artists in comics, with a body of work that few can match. How many creators can say they are beloved in equal measure by devoted fans of each of the industry’s “big two”? George Pérez can, and to prove it he can point to a formidable library of timeless stories for both Marvel and DC, which have left an indelible mark on the publishing histories of virtually every iconic hero each has to offer.

Our focus, of course, is on the many unforgettable bricks that Pérez has laid at the House of Ideas—an enduring legacy that encompasses solo heroes from Man-Wolf to the White Tiger to the Hulk...teams including the Fantastic Four and the Avengers...and villains like Taskmaster, Thanos, and the Maestro. But it all started...with Rubber Band Man.

“Rubber Band Man on my mom’s clothes hamper!” Pérez laughs, recalling his first work. “I was sitting on the potty, with no knowledge of what I was doing. I am sure it was a rubber band with the head of a man. I shudder to think what the man’s face looked like at that age—but, even back then, if you put a writing implement near me and any kind of blank surface I can only resist temptation for so long!”

Born in the South Bronx in 1954 to parents who had come to New York City from Puerto Rico, Pérez didn’t even speak English when he first got his hands on a comic





book—an issue of *Detective Comics*. “I was about 4 or 5 years old, and when I saw that first comic I just wanted to copy the fanciful figures that I saw there,” he says. “At the time I couldn’t read, so I didn’t know much of what they were actually doing, they just looked pretty. And, since we couldn’t afford drawing paper, Mom would let me tear up grocery bags to draw on.”

In 1964, at the age of 10, he got his first taste of the burgeoning Marvel Age of Comics with *Fantastic Four #30*, introducing a new villain, Diablo, from the creative masterminds Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. “That was where I saw Kirby’s work for the first time,” Pérez says. “There was something different, almost grimy in the look of that book compared to the really, really bright coloring at DC. There was just something that drew me in. So I read Marvel if we could afford to in those days. I didn’t have any other hobbies, I didn’t collect anything, so reading comics was where I spent my money, at the candy store or the local pharmacy. Sometimes the books would look a little battered as they had been in the rack for so long. You would get one issue and, unless you had a really good candy store, you might end up missing the next issue. So it became a weekly thing, going in and looking for the newest comics. Of course, once you got hooked on certain books, particularly Marvel titles, you needed to see what happened next!”

Pérez cites DC’s Curt Swan as the first major influence on his developing art style, but says that when he saw Kirby’s work “a light suddenly flashed in my head.” The “inimitable” Steve Ditko was another inspiration, Gil Kane was a “master of dynamism” and, when John Buscema came on *Avengers*, it was a “revelation.” He explains: “Buscema had the

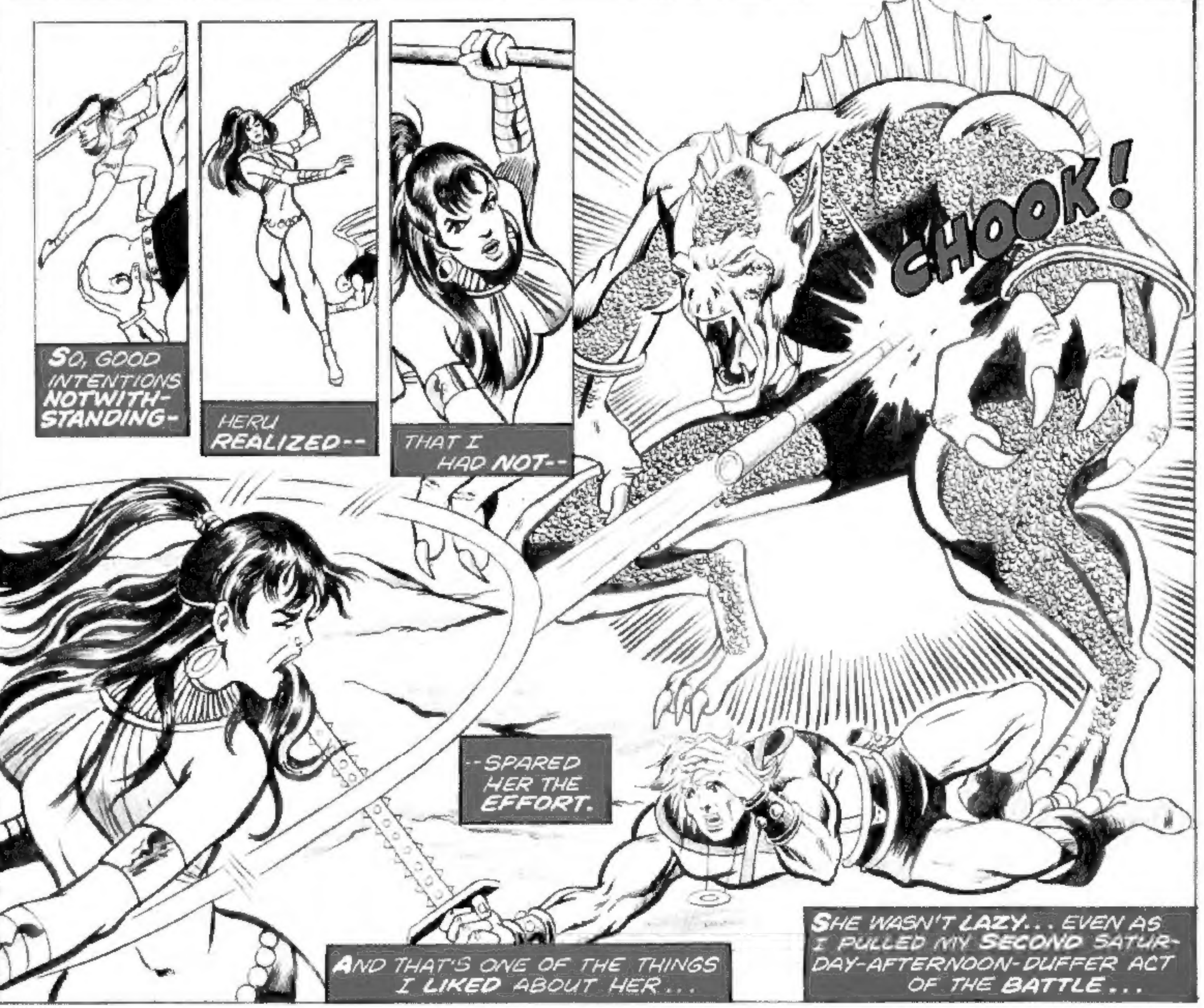
dynamism of Jack Kirby, but was a bit more realistic. I enjoyed Don Heck’s work on *Avengers* too, but there was something about Buscema that was a game-changer. I always loved the team books. Even though I read the single characters, it was the team books that got me excited—all of them together!”

Describing himself as a bit of an isolated child growing up in the South Bronx, Pérez credits the team books he loved—which also included DC’s *Legion of Super Heroes*—as helping develop his own social skills. “Trying to find other people who were interested in comic books at that time was not easy,” he says. “Now it is the in thing. Then, you were an outcast. So for me it was an escape. These characters kept me from getting into the gangs, from being a kid of the streets and thankfully not being a casualty of war, as it were. They were my refuge. They became next to family. I got that social interaction from watching the characters interact with each other.”

One of the things that particularly appealed to Pérez, without him realizing it at that point, was the so-called “Marvel method,” pioneered by Stan Lee, which meant the artists made a much larger contribution to the storytelling. “People like Jack and Steve were almost magical to have around,” he says. “They were able to carry the story artistically with a greater sense of visual dynamism. I think that was something that excited me in a subconscious way. Jack was not an anatomist. He didn’t draw characters who looked real, but he made them look powerful and important. Telling the story visually, that was really exciting to me. And I am grateful as my career went on it was the one thing that was the most natural for me. I was also a big fan of movies and television. Without taking a lesson, I was learning from Alfred Hitchcock and all the great directors of cinema. I was like a sponge. I was absorbing everything.”

And, gradually, Pérez was taking everything he absorbed from comics, movies, and TV, and trying to find a way to let it all out through his pencil: “I knew in my mind I just wanted the characters *doing* something. I was telling stories, but not coherently. I would draw scenes, but I didn’t know how they did comics. For all I knew, each of the individual panels was drawn on separate sheets of paper and they put it all together—I had no idea how they were produced. I couldn’t letter, I had no idea what inking was and, of course, for many years I didn’t have white paper. I remember when I got my first pay—working as an assistant receptionist at a rectory—I went to Woolworth’s and bought an art pad, and from then on there was no stopping me.”

As a new generation of artists began to evolve the comic book industry in the late 1960s, the wide-eyed Pérez studied their work and began to comprehend exactly





how much he had to learn, not least in respect of human anatomy: “When I was a teenager and Neal Adams came into the picture, I started to notice—this thing looks real. Why does it look real? Because the fact was people like Neal have a certain knowledge of anatomy, so I had to learn from there. Another artist who was a major influence on me—anyone who has seen my detailed work would probably understand why—was Barry Windsor-Smith. His colored stuff blew me away, particularly when he got older and moved away from the Kirby style by becoming more ornate and following the pre-Raphaelite style. He taught me what pre-Raphaelite was! I looked it up and saw how much his work was inspired by it, the amount of detail he put in. I thought, he must love what he does or be the craziest person on earth, or both. I was inspired to be that kind of madman too. It became part of my visual design. Then Jim Starlin tended to draw a lot more panels than the average person did at the time on *Captain Marvel* and *Warlock*, and that was another inspiration. I started putting more into a page, basically to tell as much story in as little space as possible.”

His illustrative education had to continue in this self-driven way as the highly regarded Catholic private high school he attended canceled its art course the year he started. “I knew that there was nothing they could provide me that would really be what I wanted,” he recalls. “I wanted to draw. I had to keep my grades up, but nothing they taught me would satisfy me unless I was able to draw.”

Fortunately, high school did at last offer him the opportunity to meet other avid comic fans. “One friend named Tom Sciacca went with me to my very first comic convention,” he says. “The addiction was irreversible at that point. There were comics being sold, artists sitting at tables, signing autographs, doing sketches—you got to see the faces of the artists whose work you admired. That’s where I met some great artists I admired, like Neal Adams, and got to see original artwork, including an unprinted Barry Windsor-Smith page—his incredible pencils were so tight. I thought, wow, look at this, this is amazing. It was exciting to be in on the creative process. Seeing familiar characters on white paper as opposed to just in the printed comic—watching some of them being created in front of me—was just an eye-opening experience. It made me realize it was more than just a hobby now, it was an obsession. It was what I wanted to do.”

Pérez did the art for his school’s yearbook—which, unsurprisingly, is now a sought-after collector’s item—and his skills were in high demand among classmates. “We were required to get school dust covers for all our textbooks,” he explains. “What I would end up doing





is turning them inside out and drawing my own characters on the cover. I started to get a lot of other students asking if I would draw on their covers. Being teenagers, most of them wanted female characters. But it was a Catholic school, so not anything lascivious!”

He met a group of fellow aspiring artists who introduced him to the world of fanzines: “It was my first taste of actually drawing something with panels and story progression. I even drew one on basic drawing paper and I lettered it, I did everything with a flared pen marker and colored pencils. It was the crudest thing. I had no idea what to color ink with. What I didn’t know was that all the colors were reproduced when they were printed—they were not the original color separated versions. I was asking, how come I couldn’t get the red to be smooth and flat like I saw in the comics? And obviously, now I know, it was because I wasn’t a printer. I remember, a friend of mine was reading my hand-made comic called ‘The Battalion’—even then, a team book. The Dean of Discipline spotted it. He didn’t want students reading comic books in class, so he took it and tore it in half. Tom Sciacca actually glued it back together. But the fact the teacher was actually fooled into thinking that was a real comic? It was like a back-handed compliment.”

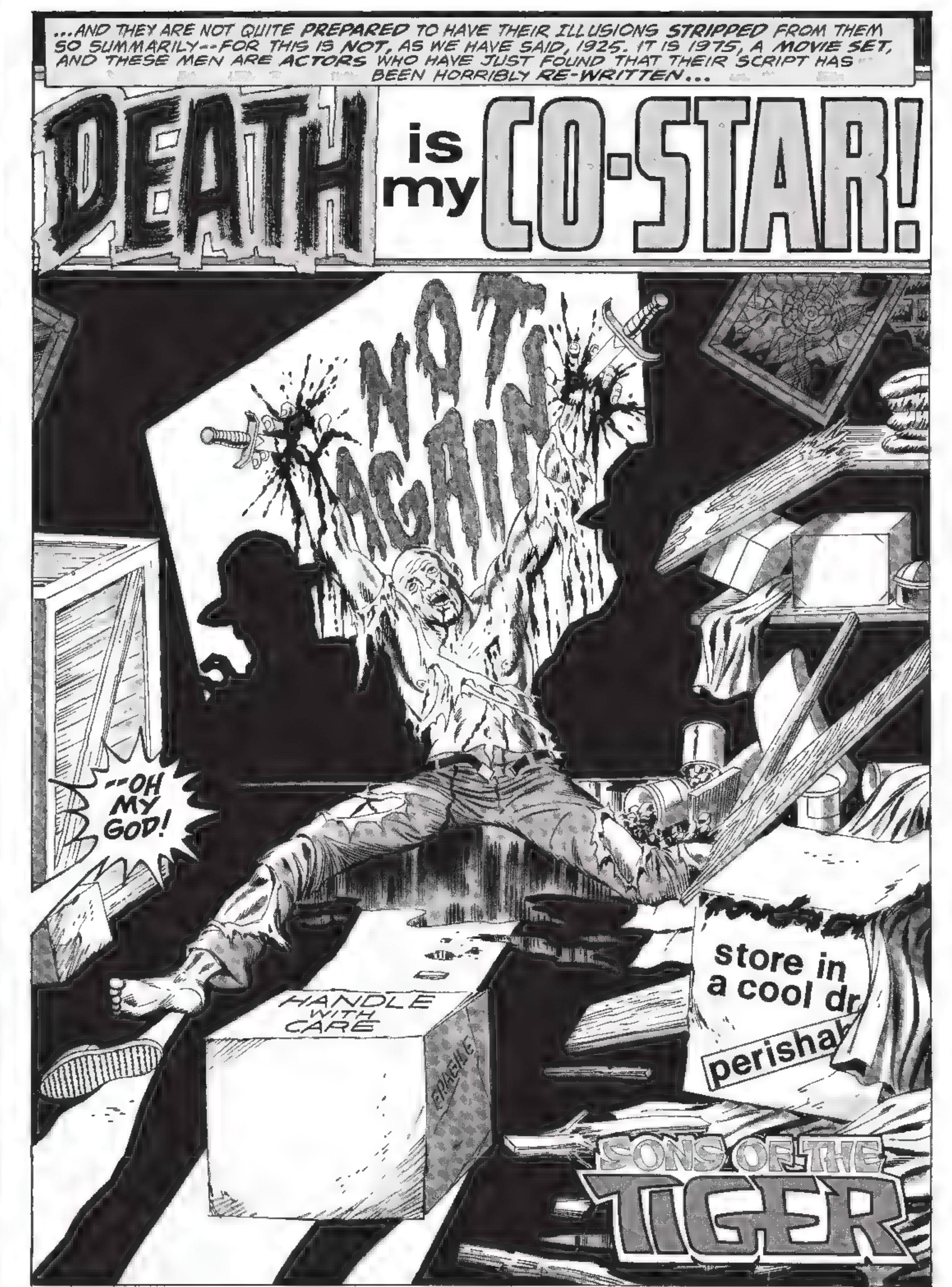
Pérez’s work was getting ever more convincing—and within just a few years, he would be doing it for real. But, after graduating high school, first he had to listen to his parents’ advice: “I wanted to be an artist and my Mom and Dad—particularly my Mom, being the wise one—said you can try to be an artist, but if you are not going to go to college then you have to get a job. She gave me the summer, I tried showing my work around, but wasn’t getting anywhere. So I got a job, the only one I could get, a low-paying bank teller job.”

Young love led the 19-year-old Pérez to marry, making a regular income all the more important. But he continued drawing for fanzines and taking his sample pages to conventions. He sought work at Neal Adams’ studio, Continuity Associates, but while he wasn’t hired, he received some invaluable—if painful—advice from the legendary



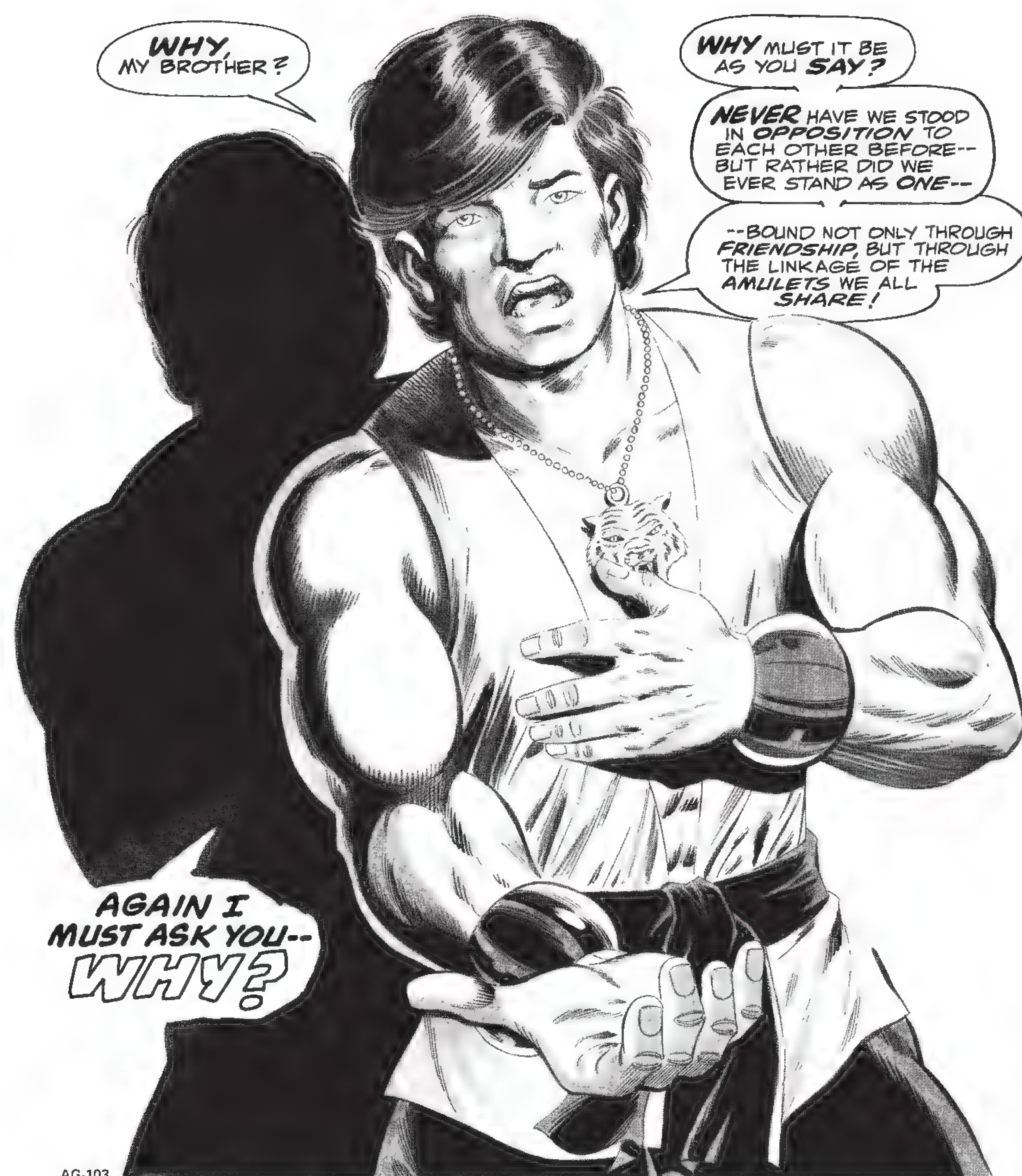
Adams himself. “Neal was harsh and critical—but he was right,” Pérez says. “The fact was that he was not my Dad, he was not going to take anything that I drew and put it on the refrigerator proudly. No, he told me, if you want to be paid, you have to be worth paying. If you want to become an artist, you have to be willing to be criticized and you have to be willing to grow. He looked at my work, and I was trying to ink myself, and he said ‘don’t ink yourself.’ He said you might get work for DC, but you are not ready for Marvel. He actually thought Marvel’s artwork was superior, even though he drew for both companies. I was shell-shocked and, for one brief instant, I felt maybe I was wasting my time. But, just as quickly, I said no. If I was able to survive his words, then I already had the heart of an artist, I just needed that ounce more ability to match it. One of the things about that experience is that, as much as I joke about the fact I still have scars and blisters to this day from Neal’s criticism, he was also one of the very first people to congratulate me when I got into the industry.”

Driven on by the stinging experience, Pérez persevered and, finally, at one convention he had an encounter with another artist that would change everything. Rich Buckler, who was fast making a name for himself on books including *Jungle Action*, starring the Black Panther, saw Pérez’s work—and his potential as an assistant. It was an offer too good to refuse, despite what it would mean for his workload. “That’s when things started really cooking,” Pérez says, as he recounts his days juggling two jobs. “I was working banker’s hours then there were times I was out late over at Rich’s place doing whatever he needed done. Sometimes searching for a reference, bordering the pages and the like, and helping him on *Fantastic Four* and *Thor*. But one of the things I did was sometimes go with him to the offices of Marvel Comics. Now I was in the temple! I tried to make myself known. The industry then, even still today, was made of young people, all not



“I was not a kung fu expert—I tended to add a lot more exaggerated Marvel action to it as opposed to making it look like real martial arts. If you look at martial arts books without movement, it comes across as a little bit stiff, so I had to jazz it up a bit. There are other artists who handle martial arts who are into the arts and were able to do the action much more authentically—but I had that big bombastic Marvel style at the time.”

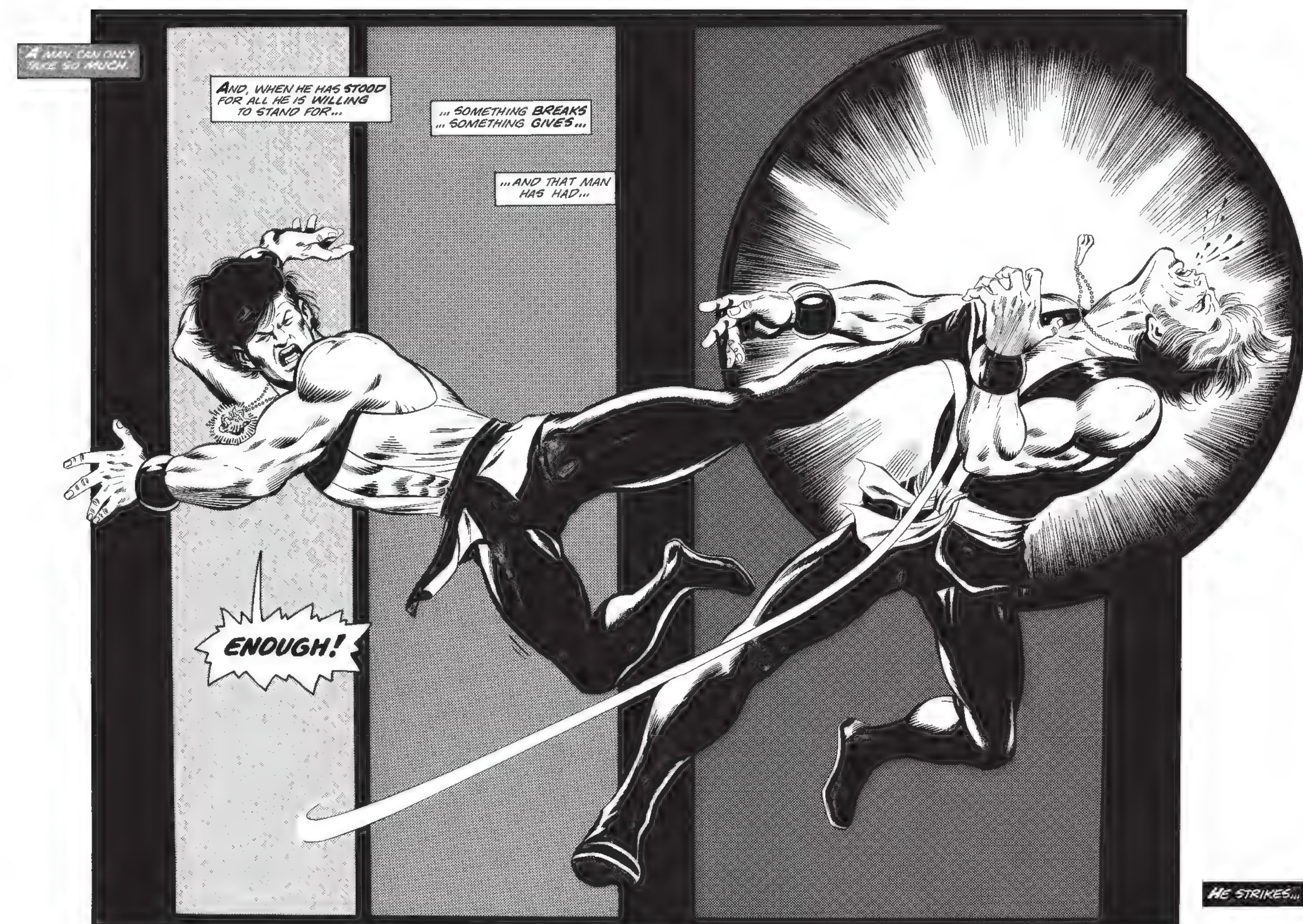
— GEORGE PÉREZ



much older than me. They were the new wave. They wanted to experiment, they wanted to expand to keep the fire burning that was begun by Stan and Jack and Steve and all those others—and I was there. Seeing all this artwork go back and forth, seeing actually what an editor does, seeing the designs of the covers that John Romita and Marie Severin were bringing in...it was an exciting time. Thankfully, because of the fact I was working with Rich, when he fell behind on certain things, they asked if I could fill in.”

Pérez’s very first printed work was a two-page gag strip at the end of *Astonishing Tales* #25—the issue in which Buckler and writer Doug Moench introduced the cyborg Deathlok. But while Pérez was trusted to pencil cartoonish representations of the two creators, the character was “Rich’s baby”—so Buckler himself drew Deathlok rising out of the trash can in the final panel. Still, this was a Marvel Comic featuring the words “Drawn by: George Perez.” It may not have had the accent on the first “e,” but there would be plenty of time to make up for that—after all, he had achieved this distinction before turning 20.

Marvel’s growing output, which had expanded beyond color comic books to black-and-white magazines, offered opportunities for a hungry young artist eager to make his name. And, before long, Pérez stepped up to the plate when Buckler ran late on a story for just such a magazine, *Monsters Unleashed*. The tale—another collaboration with Moench, featuring Gullivar Jones, Warrior of Mars—was one which Pérez confesses he was “ill-prepared for.” He laughs: “I was also rushed because the book was late. I look at that stuff and think, wow, I am glad I got work after that! But I lucked out being in the right place at the right time. They had a lot of product. They had books



that no one wanted to do. They needed to get them out, who could they call? Let’s get this young kid, he’ll do anything!”

That willingness on his part quickly paid dividends, as Pérez took the chance to show his potential on a pair of fill-in gigs that could hardly be more different. First, the “Sons of the Tiger” feature in #6 of the black-and-white title *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*, featuring martial arts trio Lin Sun, Abe Brown, and Bob Diamond, and written by Denny O’Neil. Then, the full-color *Creatures on the Loose* #33, starring the former Spider-Man villain-turned-super hero, Man-Wolf.

“In both cases, those strips were about to be handed off to new writers,” Pérez recalls. “Bill Mantlo for ‘Sons of the Tiger’ and David Kraft for ‘Man-Wolf,’ and they both liked the enthusiasm that I brought to each series. This is what those books needed—someone who was excited to do it, and it not being just a job. So they both said ‘let’s get this Perez kid.’ I got two series at the same time!”

And so, the untrained Pérez began learning on the job, hugely excited to be doing his dream job, and drawing “incredibly fast” to meet his deadlines—and earn his all-important paycheck. He is thankful to both Mantlo and Kraft for what he describes as a “golden time” in which he discovered a great deal about the collaborative role of the artist in comic book production.

“Each writer has their own style of how they plot. Some write some of the dialogue,

“White Tiger was one of the simplest costumes to design. The only color is the emerald amulet. One of the simplest designs, but it seems to have weathered the test of time.”

— GEORGE PÉREZ



others give you the basic choreography and you handle it from there,” Pérez says. “One of the things I found, not only working with Bill and Dave, but every collaborator eventually, is that I was valuable to them in the collaborative process, like Jack was to Stan. I had a natural knack for this. I wanted to contribute to the story, which was the antithesis of what I previously thought comics was. I figured you get a full script and you get to illustrate what is on the script. But actually, you are asked to participate, to create. If you want to change something you don’t have to get permission, just as long as it stays true to the story. It is all about the symbiotic relationship between you and your collaborator and, if it clicks, the whole is better than any bit of the parts. I learned to be a team player—just like I love team books—and I liked surprising the writer, getting from A to B by taking a slightly different route. Otherwise, I was contributing nothing but pretty pictures. I wanted to be part of the story and that’s what I started learning more and more, particularly with the Marvel style as they called it. I thought, yes, this is very creatively fulfilling, and the more I participated, the more they wanted me involved in the storytelling. The script plots became looser because they knew they didn’t have to explain very much because I would take it from there.”

Together, Mantlo and Pérez evolved their ongoing *Deadly Hands* feature by replacing its lead trio with a new costumed vigilante—Marvel’s first Puerto Rican super hero. Hector Ayala debuted at the end of #19, finding the discarded amulets of the Sons

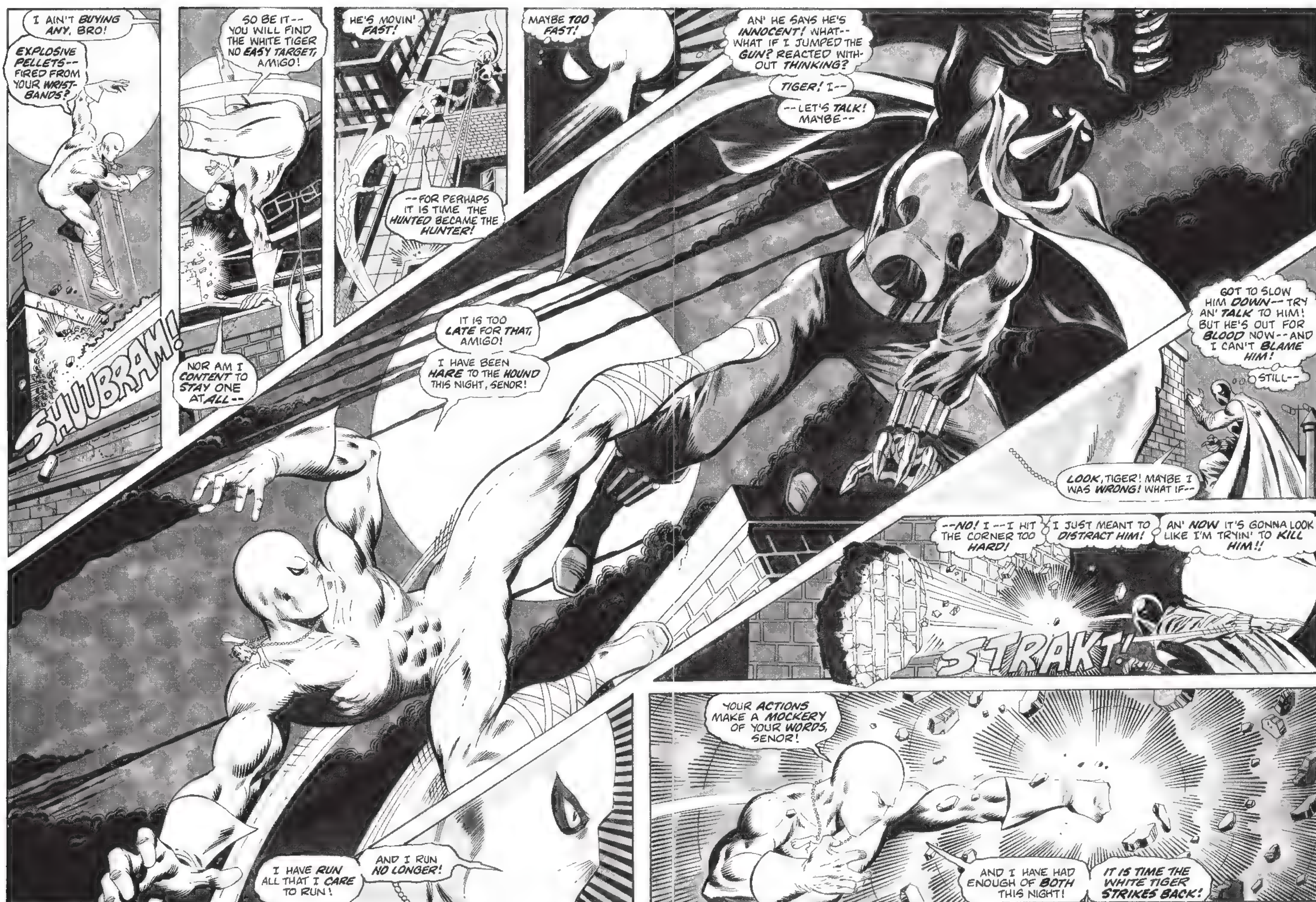


of the Tiger, and, on donning all three, was transformed into the White Tiger, with a strikingly simple Pérez costume design.

“Despite the fact I am Puerto Rican, Bill came up with the idea of White Tiger,” Pérez says. “But I had the advantage that I could dig into my own upbringing to be able to provide a sense of verisimilitude to the character. The White Tiger facially, I based on my brother. His mother was obviously inspired by my own. It was the age of a lot of social consciousness, so Bill wanted to do some stories that were more than just kick-ass and which had some kind of social relevance. The White Tiger lent a nice bit of respectability to *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*.”

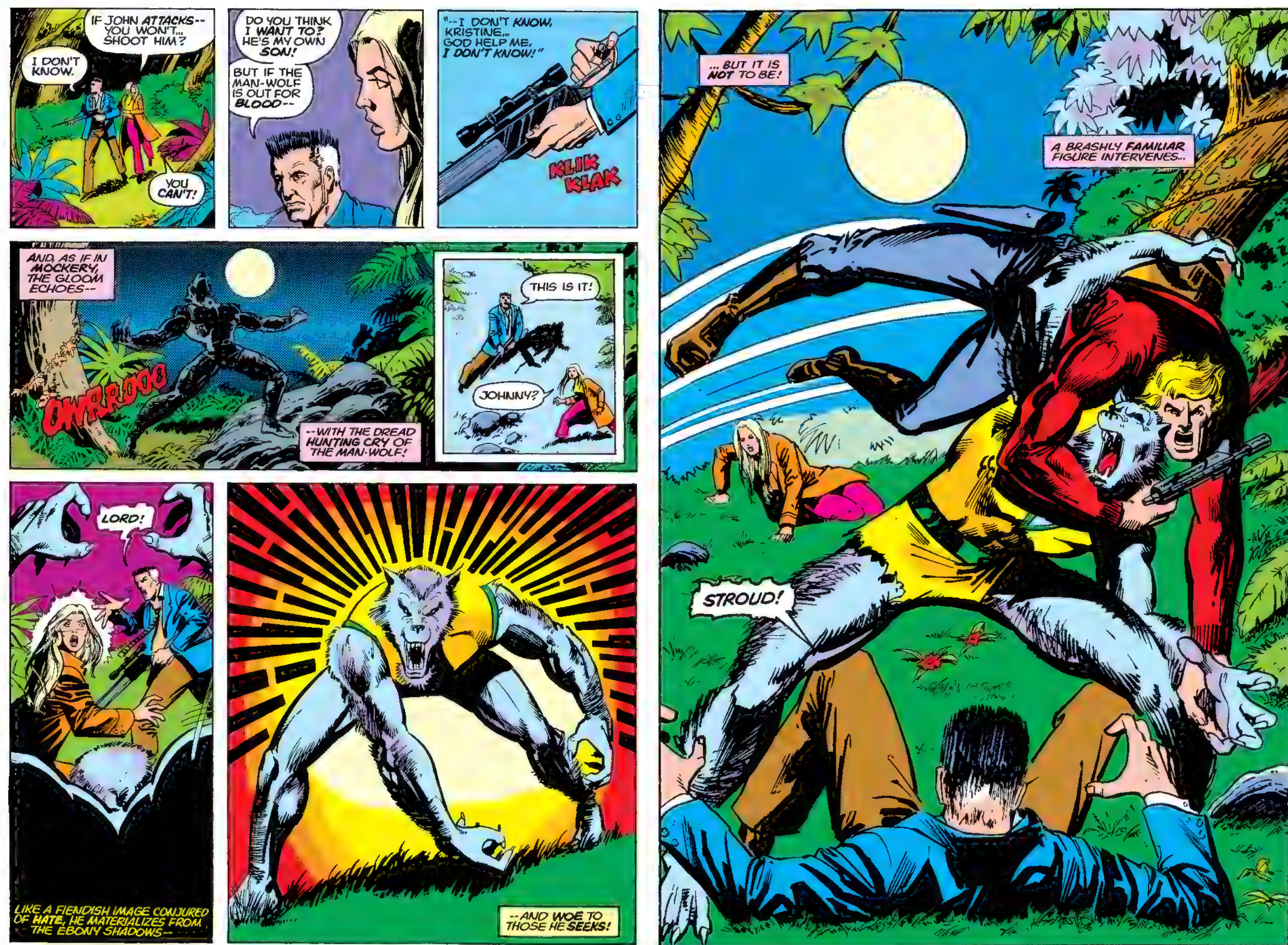
Meanwhile, Kraft and Pérez set about taking Man-Wolf—already a strange hybrid of the horror and super hero genres—and steering him in the direction of far-out science fiction fantasy, in a story line that would culminate in the character becoming known as the Stargod when his adventures eventually concluded in the pages of *Marvel Premiere*.

Looking back at his “Man-Wolf” work, Pérez admits that it looks a little rough, but says that you can “sense the development” of an artist starting to grow, and see his evolution, issue-by-issue—a process which, he feels, should never be over. “That’s what I recommend to every artist,” he says. “The day you say ‘I have done the best that I can do’ is the day you will stagnate. Whenever they asked me what my best work is, I always hoped it was my next work.”



“My biggest note to George was on perspective. Three-point perspective is pretty much a science and in the beginning he wasn’t strong on that. But because it is a science it can be taught and understood. His actual drawing wasn’t great yet, but his storytelling was on the mark from day one. One can possibly teach and learn anatomy and perspective, and how to draw the folds in clothing, and facial expressions, but it’s really difficult to teach storytelling. Fortunately, George understood that straight out of the gate. And because he understood that, I figured, if he applied himself his drawing would improve too. And boy, did it. George went off and then came back only a few days later with that incredible full page shot from ‘White Tiger.’ He completely mastered perspective, then he approached every phase of comic art and storytelling with the same single focused dedication. It didn’t take him long to go from semi-talented beginner to A-list master. Even after he got to be good, he kept pushing and learning. He never stopped improving. He was the poster boy for showing how dedication and hard work can pay off.” — MARV WOLFMAN





Pérez helped make a little bit of history in *Power Man* #27—illustrating the first time that Luke Cage utters his trademark phrase, “Sweet Christmas!” But he cites a lesser-known black-and-white short story in 1975’s *Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction* #2—“War Toy,” written by Tony Isabella and featuring the titular prototype robot soldier—as a major step forward, artistically. “Tony considers it one of his favorite things he wrote at the time,” Pérez says. “I learned so much in doing that story, with a lot of drama—and an incredible ink job by Rico Rival. There is a big challenge in doing a short story that is done in one. It requires you to really, really pay attention as a storyteller. You don’t have the luxury of continuing it on in the next issue. Everything has to be done now.”

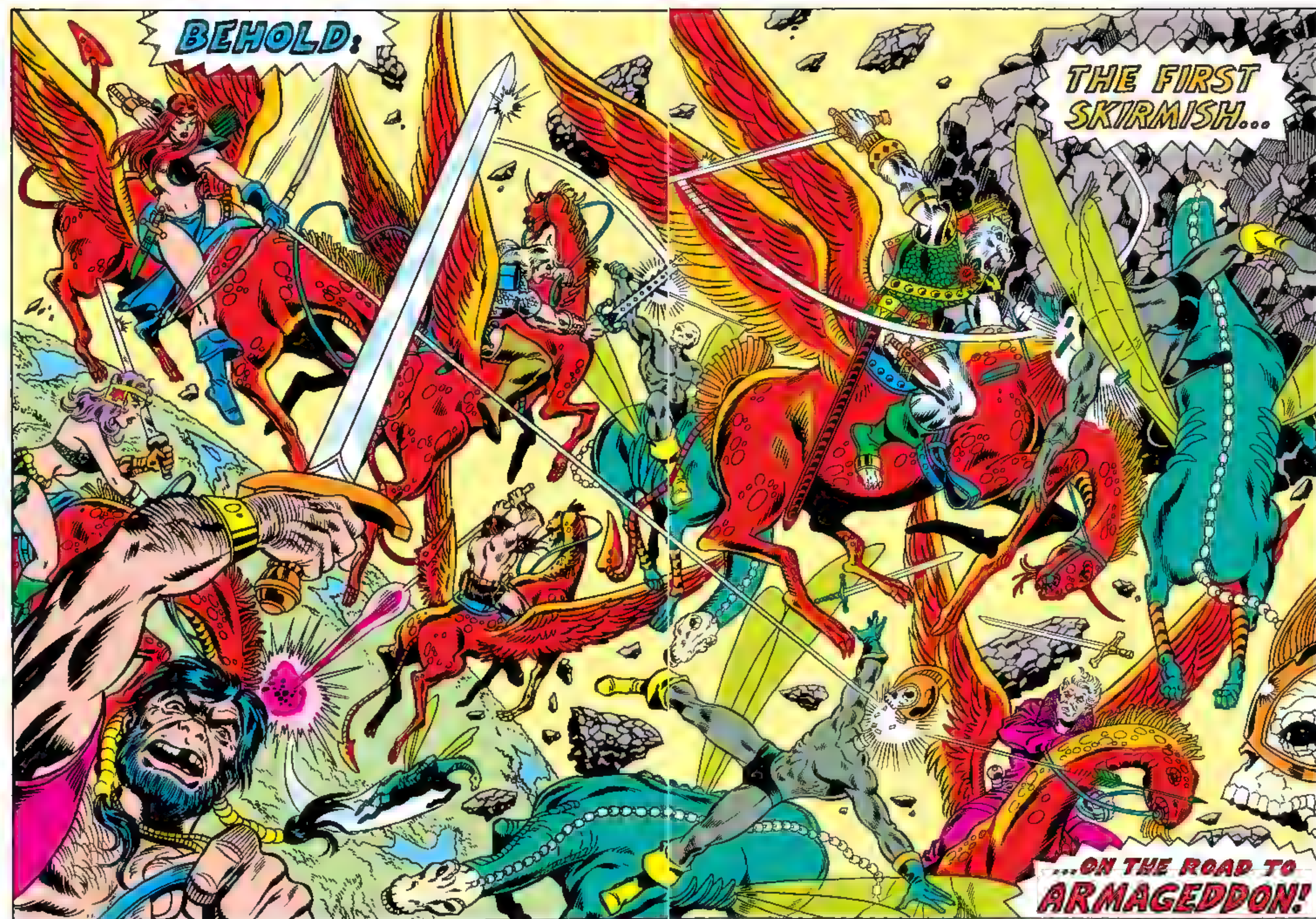
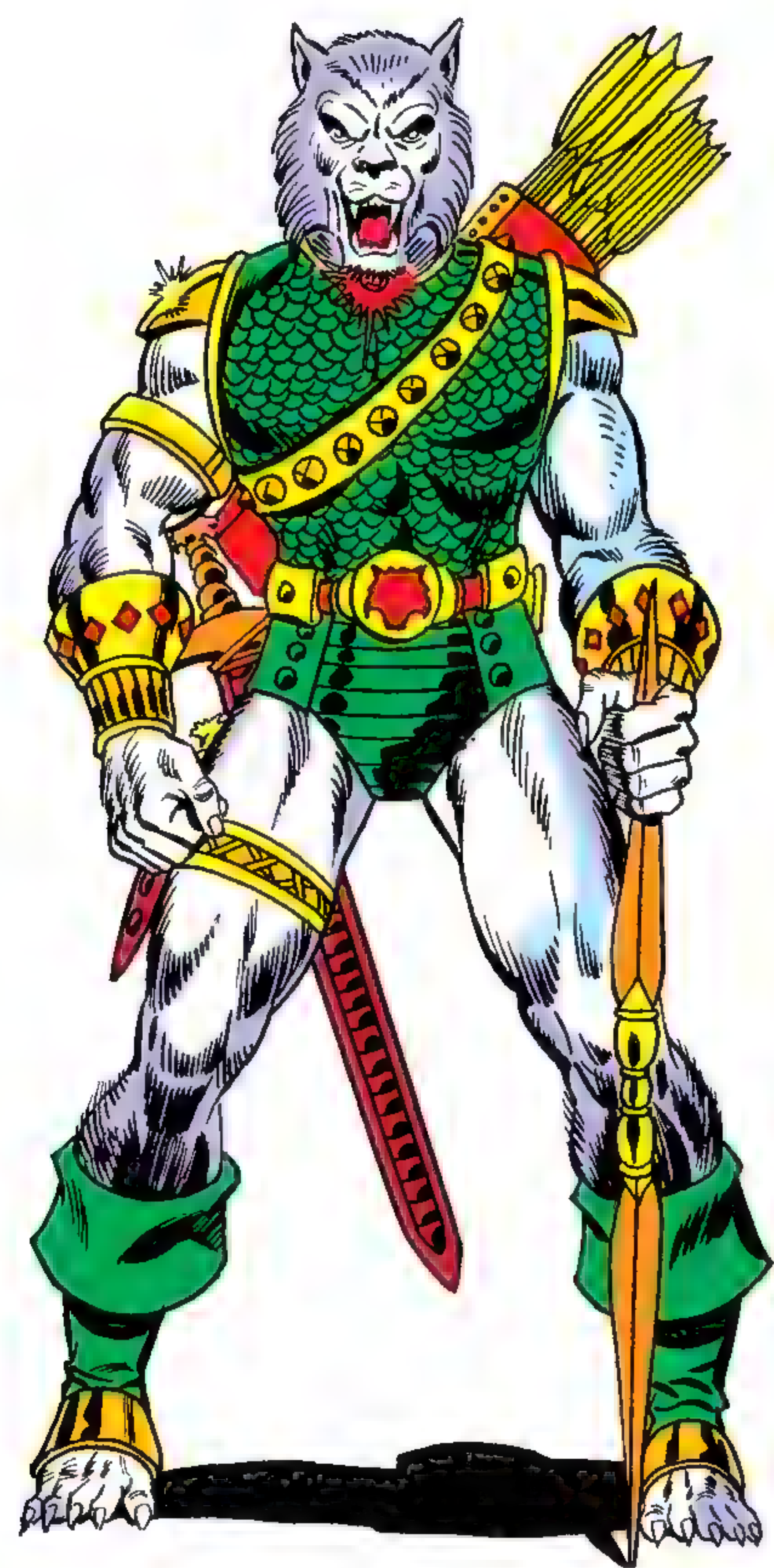
With a growing body of work, including not only two comic book series, but his first major co-creation joining the Marvel pantheon of heroes, Pérez was off to the races—and fans started to pay attention. “‘Sons of the Tiger’ was an irregular backup series and ended up becoming the lead feature with *White Tiger*,” Pérez recalls. “Meanwhile, ‘Man-Wolf’ was usually rock bottom of the color horror line and David and I managed to raise the sales on that one. Without realizing it, I was part of what was making these characters popular, what made the difference. I was not a journeyman, just willing to get the job done. I really wanted to add something and had very generous collaborators who allowed me to.”

By this point, Pérez was firmly a comic book artist in his own right, but he had learned a great deal from his time as an assistant to Buckler, whose *Black Panther* work he particularly loved because it was “pure Rich.” On *Fantastic Four* and *Thor*, he feels that Buckler had to follow more closely the visual style established by Jack Kirby, losing something of his



own in the process. This strengthened Pérez’s determination that he was going to be his own man: “One of the main things that I learned for myself was the fact that, yes, we have to be inspired by artists—definitely stuff by Kirby, Adams, and Kane congealed and became my style—but I couldn’t actively and deliberately swipe another artist, because then I would lose my identity. As much as I learned from Rich what to do, I also learned things I didn’t want to do. For better or worse, I was going to be George Pérez. Not George Pérez doing Kirby, George Pérez doing anyone else—I was going to be George Pérez.”

But to become *the* George Pérez—the one so beloved by fans across the world—he had to get better, a point rammed home to him by another of the biggest influences on his career: Marvel editor Marv Wolfman. Like Neal Adams before him, Wolfman did not hold back on the constructive criticism of the untrained Pérez’s “crude” grasp of



perspective and anatomy—but he could see the young artist’s potential shining through in terms of his storytelling ability. And, just as Pérez had responded to Adams’ words with determination, he was driven to show Wolfman exactly what he could do.

“Marv used to be an art teacher, and he would criticize certain things, like the fact that my backgrounds looked a little sparse and I didn’t seem to understand perspective. So I ended up doing a splash page [in *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #21] which has become a touchstone in my career—of the White Tiger, atop a cityscape, with some of the buildings forming the words ‘White Tiger.’ It has been described as ‘a la Eisner’—but at the time I didn’t even know who Will Eisner was! I showed it to Marv saying ‘Do I have it?’—and Marv admitted, ‘Yeah, you got it.’ I wouldn’t have taken that effort if Marv hadn’t criticized me. Like with Neal, and other people who criticized my work, I wanted to prove them wrong. But, as I have told a number of young aspiring artists over the years, what I actually did was prove them right, because I addressed the problem. Rather than just being petulant and over-protective of my work, I went to the next level—which I wouldn’t have done if they hadn’t shown me that I was not doing it right. It wasn’t up to them to teach me, I had to learn on my own—which I did as much as I could. That kind of drive and determination, that fearlessness got me further than if I hadn’t had such harsh criticism. I never had an art class, I was never graded, I had never had to have my work judged. So the criticism I got from Neal and Marv was an invaluable thing. That’s why I tell a lot of artists that the thing you have to be careful of is how much ego you bring to the table. You need enough ego to defend your work, but not so much that you don’t hear the positive criticism. We need our egos, because that is the only way you can justify doing this and why people will publish you. But because they are publishing you, paying you, they have a right to have you meet their standards.”

Pérez jokes that he is the “Frankenstein’s monster that Marv Wolfman created,” because, in addressing his apparent shortcomings, the drive to add detail to his pages became an addiction. But he is also a product of his upbringing. His strong work ethic and tireless desire for self-improvement—instilled in him as a young man, and stoked along the way by Adams and Wolfman—never stopped burning within him.

“I have always been so happy to be working in comics,” he says, with an enthusiasm as infectious as it is genuine. “I was a kid from a poor family—but we appreciated the value of the dollar. You have to be grateful when you do get the money and, in my



case, I have seen a lot of contemporaries from my neighborhood, how hard they have had to struggle—their lives did not turn out well. Here I was, as a teenager without a college education, getting to do exactly what I had wanted to do since I was 5 years old. How many people can say that as a teenager what they got to do became their life’s work? But because I wanted it to be my life’s work, I was so appreciative—and that appreciation meant that I had to always prove myself worthy. I wanted to prove that I was worth the money they were paying me. I needed to do more to justify that they were paying me to do something I love.”

Pérez would indeed do more—a lot more. It was time to graduate from martial artists and werewolves to a bona fide top-tier super-team...or two...or three?

“That era, the Seventies, was really creative. Anything goes. I have an articulate werewolf in armor riding a flying steed along with this guy that looks like a caveman. Where else could you come up with this type of stuff, man? Bonkers.”

— GEORGE PÉREZ



CHAPTER TWO

THE FIRST FAMILY & THE ROYAL FAMILY

“It was like being a Catholic and being ordained by the Pope...”

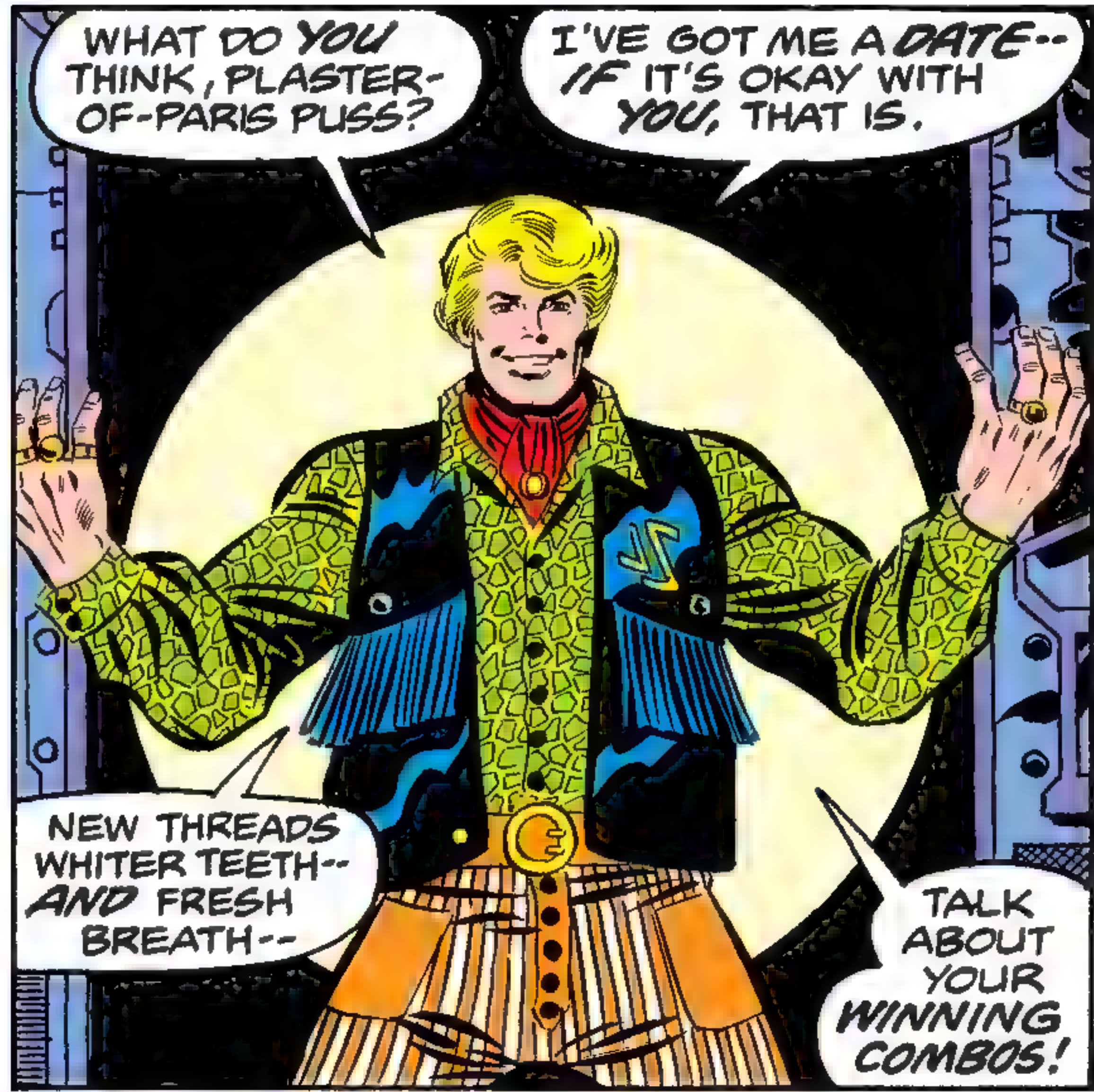
George Pérez’s developing prowess was getting him noticed. And when, toward the end of 1975, his work first graced the pages of one of Marvel’s premier titles—“The World’s Greatest Comics Magazine,” no less—he gained a very notable new fan. None other than “The Man” himself—Marvel publisher Stan Lee. It was an opportunity that arose once again thanks to Rich Buckler’s busy schedule. Pérez stepped in to pencil what was intended as an Annual, but actually saw print as a two-part tale in *Fantastic Four* #164-165, the first cover-dated November 1975. And so arrived the artist’s date with destiny.

“I had seen Stan walking through the corridors from time to time, but never really met him,” Pérez recalls. “After that first *Fantastic Four* issue came out, I got a call from his secretary saying Stan wanted to meet me. Obviously, I was thrilled.

He wanted to see who this name was that he didn’t recognize. He read the book making the assumption that it was drawn by Joe Sinnott, the inker, or either John Romita or John Buscema—he didn’t recognize my name at all. He asked me if I was being treated well and told me right then and there that, as long as he was at Marvel, I would always have a job. Here I was talking in the office directly to Stan Lee! Still being the fanboy I was, I brought comics with me for him to sign—*Origins of Marvel Comics* and a couple of other books—and he was more than gracious in signing them. The thing that amazed me through the years is that, despite obvious physical changes that I’ve gone through and Stan’s sometimes notorious reputation for having a faulty memory, he always remembered me and always asked the same question: ‘Why haven’t we gotten to work together?’ But to get that stamp of approval as a young artist...from that point on, my career was on an upward path and I never turned back.”



Not only did Pérez have the endorsement of one of the co-creators of the Fantastic Four—the face of Marvel Comics—he was working with Lee’s protégé and successor as Editor in Chief, Roy Thomas, a comic book legend in his own right. And the partnership proved so successful on that initial story—in which they brought back Golden Age hero Marvel Boy as a powerful new adversary named the Crusader—that



Pérez remained on the book, alternating with Buckler for much of 1976. Together, Thomas and Pérez pitted the FF against—and then teamed the Thing up with—the Hulk, and then (with a writing assist from Bill Mantlo) brought back Galactus, this time with a hunger for the High Evolutionary’s Counter-Earth.

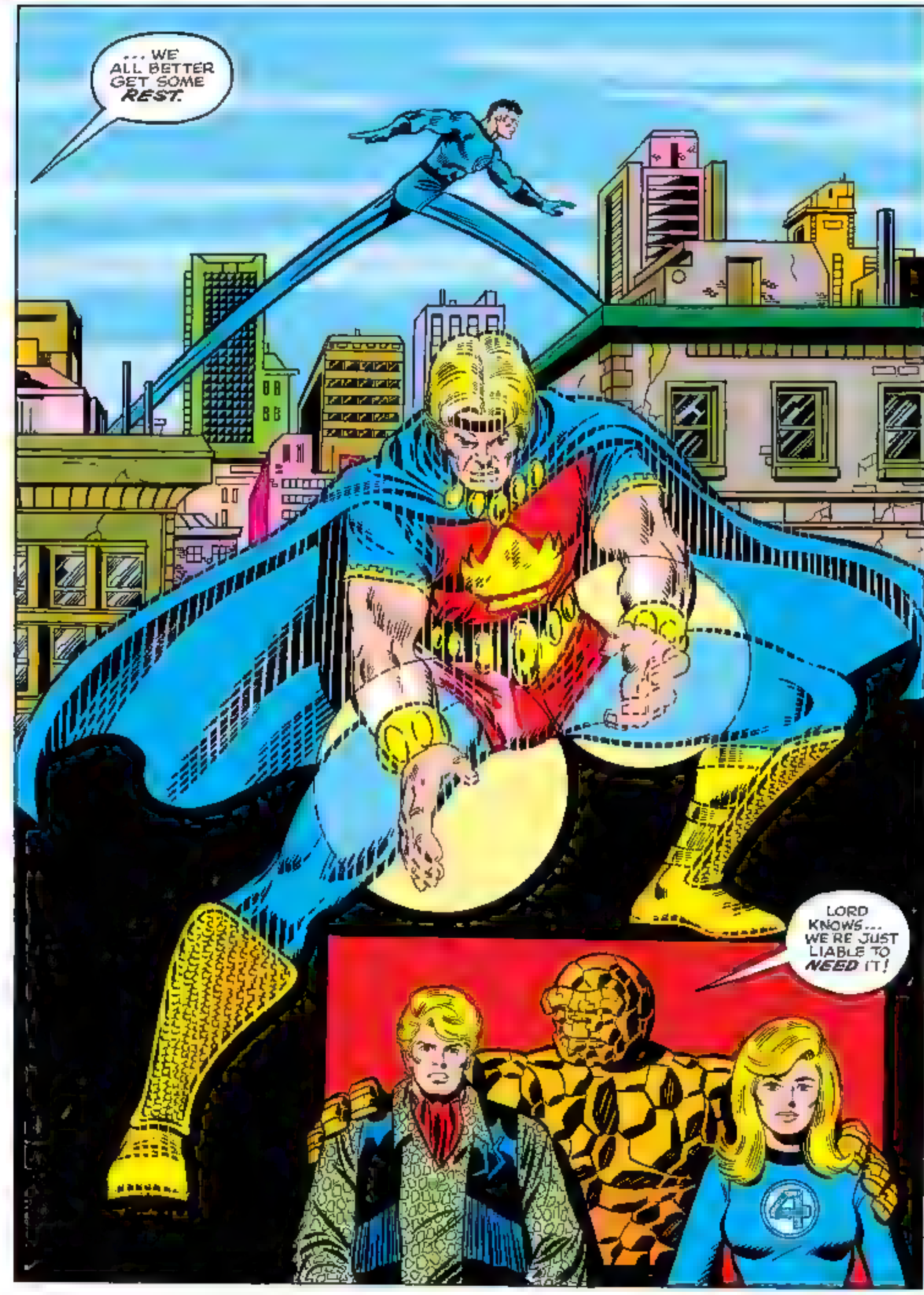
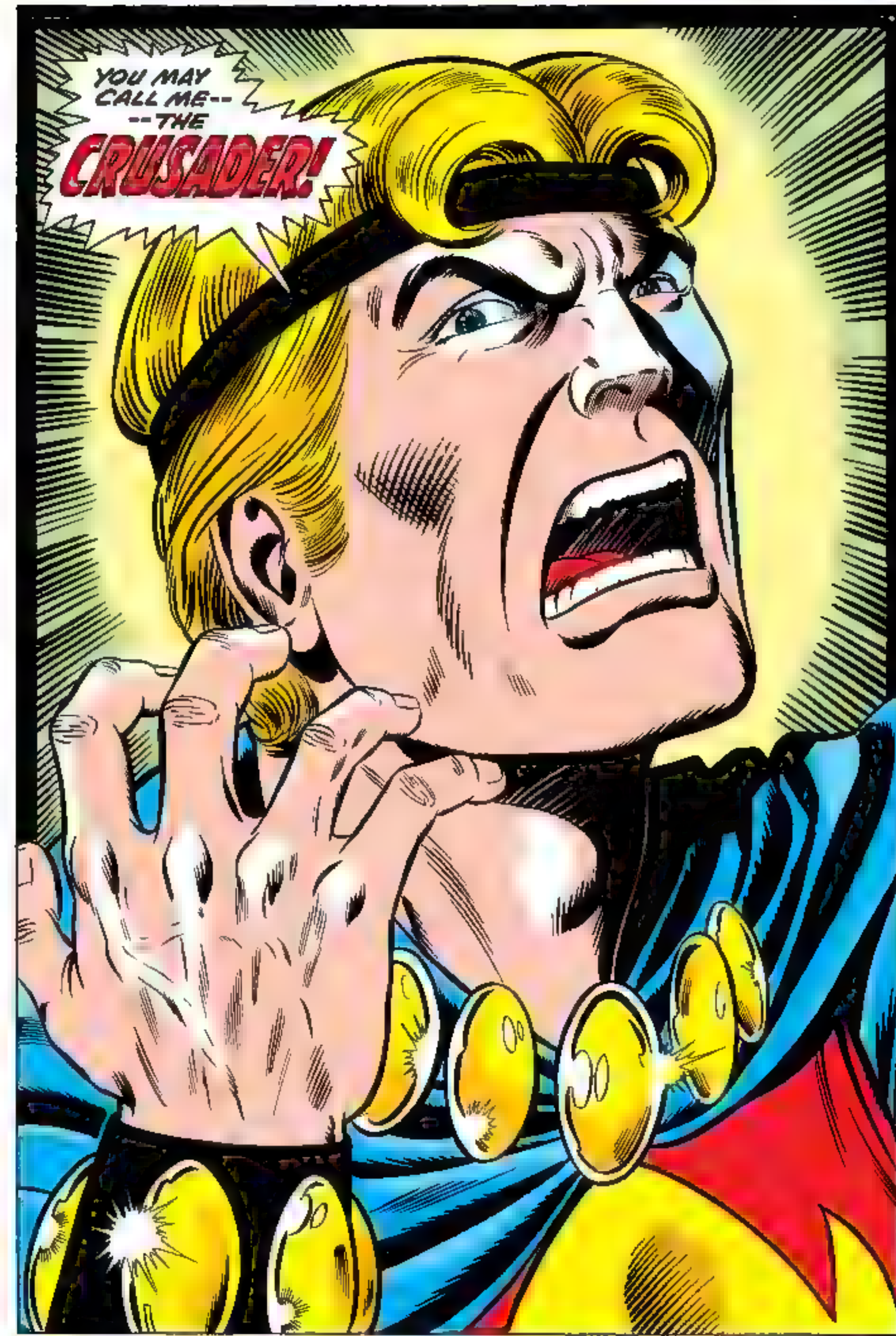
And, along the way, Pérez learned much from the collaboration—not least in how to tailor his work to Marvel’s house style for its iconic characters. “Like Stan, Roy was very hands-on about how the characters should look,” Pérez recalls. “He would comment on the way I had the Thing standing or walking, saying it is a little ‘un-Thing like.’ I had to understand how their body language works, to keep the characters on model. One funny thing that I did, because I came from a low-income, urban Puerto Rican background, was in my first issue, I had Johnny Storm dressed in clothes more suitable to a pimp than a young blond man from Long Island. It was totally, totally inappropriate for Johnny Storm. Roy let that go because it was too funny, I guess. But he was very good at guiding little, subtle things that really give you a good grasp of who the characters are. Like with Reed Richards. People have changed this along the way, but back then, seldom did you see him stretch by the neck. That makes him too comical—he was not Plastic Man. So the stretch is in the body—his arms and limbs, but not the neck.”

At this period in his career, Pérez was grateful for such expert guidance from Thomas, Marv Wolfman, and others. “Archie Goodwin was another person who was incredibly, incredibly generous with his advice,” Pérez adds. “John Romita was quite severe many times in his criticisms, but I learned from him. I was incredibly fortunate, for a man who had no art training at all going through the school system, I was being given the best art lessons that any person could ever want—and I was being paid to do it. I wanted to be a comic book artist so badly that I was willing to take the bricks that were thrown at me and build a house out of them. I don’t know, if I had started at DC, whether I would have improved as quickly. I think Marvel had really strong, dynamic storytelling as part of the visuals, as opposed to just following a script. So I think I learned faster how to be a good, dynamic storyteller because I started at Marvel.”

Looking back at his *Fantastic Four* run with Thomas, Pérez describes that initial Crusader story as a “crowning glory” because it was his first chance to illustrate such important characters that he had grown up with: Mister Fantastic, the Invisible Girl, the Human Torch, and his personal favorite, the Thing. And another highlight was *Fantastic Four* #176, titled “Improbable as it may seem—the Impossible Man is back in town!” The return of such a wacky alien from the classic Stan Lee/Jack Kirby run inspired the two creators to go wild, bringing the action to the Marvel Bullpen itself, with appearances by them and other creators. “I was drawing all these people in the offices of Marvel Comics, some of whom I had never met at the time—I had never met Kirby at that point. But I felt that, drawing myself in with Roy, with Jack and all these other people in the Bullpen, I was one of the boys now. I was part of the in-crowd. I remember when I was drawing it how some of the other creators in the industry wanted to be involved in this story. The color artist who did it [Michele Wolfman] asked specifically ‘can I color this issue?’ Everyone wanted to be involved in the story as it was a lot of fun.”

And Pérez is quick to point out the vital importance of another member of the *Fantastic Four* creative team: inker Joe Sinnott, who, following his celebrated collaboration with Kirby on the series, had embellished the FF work of Romita, Buckler, and Buscema.

“I always give credit to Joe—and Joe was always flattered by the fact that I always singled him out,” Pérez says. “I used to think that he followed my line and he really made it look good with a nice sense of weight and balance. It wasn’t until later on, when I saw my original pages, that I realized where my pencil line was and how Joe subtly



changed it in order to make it more in model and to get a sleeker look. Joe did make me look better. He was incredibly good at being faithful, yet understanding that he had to keep the character looking like the character. I don’t think Stan would have called me into his office if it hadn’t been for Joe Sinnott. Joe was one of the unsung heroes of comics, but not unsung by me—because I am always singing it! He was a hero in the start of my career, because he made me look really professional.”

At the same time as drawing Marvel’s First Family, Pérez added a closely related title to his quickly filling plate—the bi-monthly *Inhumans*, starring the uncanny Royal Family that Lee, Kirby, and Sinnott had debuted during arguably the most imaginative period of their *Fantastic Four* run, which had so wowed a certain wide-eyed, would-be artist a decade earlier.

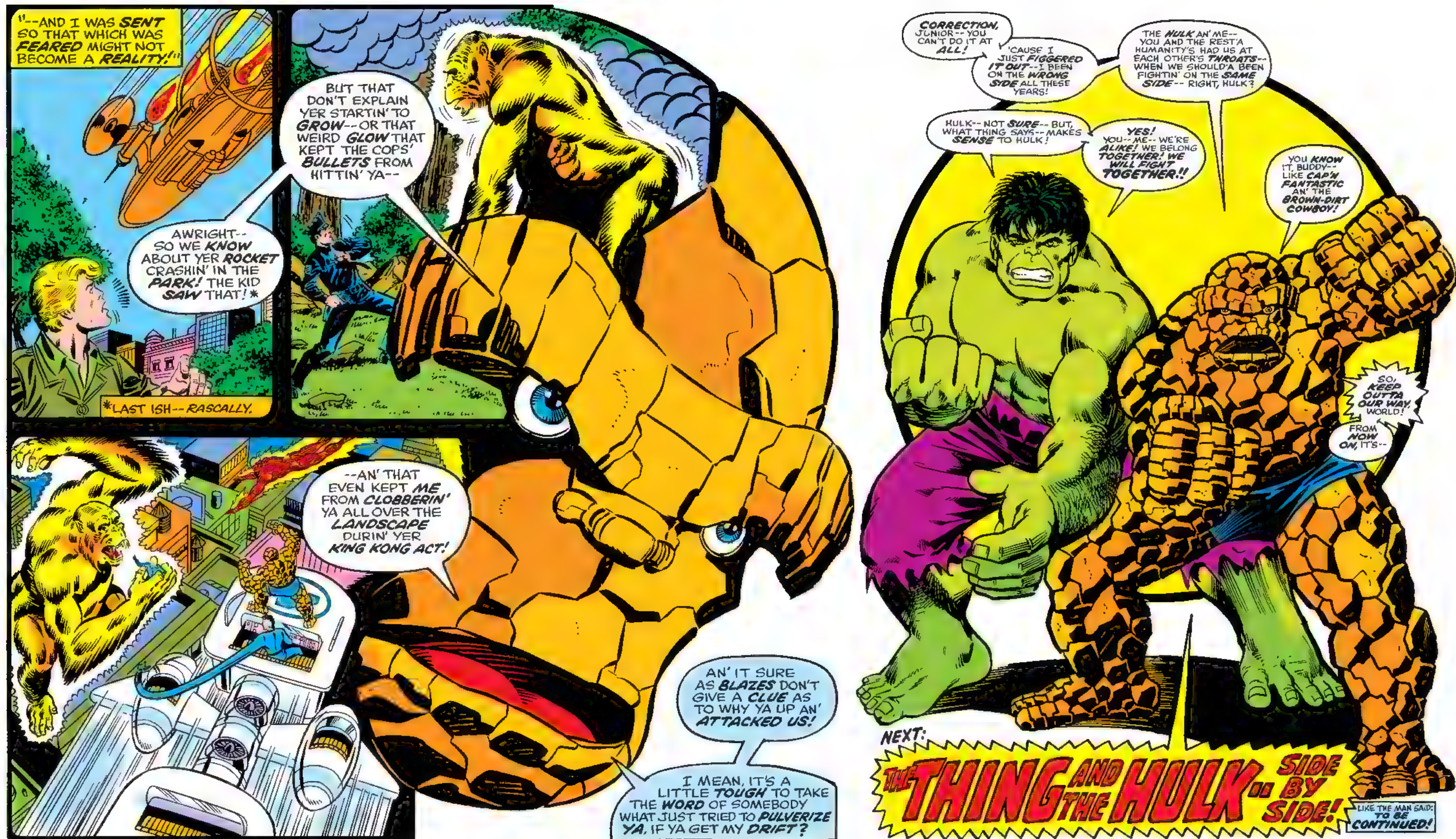
“I grew up with those characters, I remember when they first came out,” Pérez says of Black Bolt and his fellow Inhumans. “I loved their look, I loved the characters, I thought they were fantastic. Wonderful designs...the concept, the whole background of them. At that point in time, I thought Marvel could do no wrong—Jack was at his creative peak.”

This was the Inhumans’ first named series, following a stint in *Amazing Adventures* illustrated by both Kirby and Neal Adams. As a result, the offer to draw #1—which came via Pérez’s *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* collaborator Bill Mantlo, who was also a production assistant at Marvel at the time—was one the eager artist could not refuse...even if it had a ridiculously short deadline.

“The idea of doing *Inhumans* was something unexpected and, since the book was already behind schedule, it had to be drawn in a week,” Pérez says. “I had to do every shortcut possible and I still put a lot of detail in there. Doug Moench’s script was one of the most densely scripted books I have worked on ever. He packed more into a page than a lot of people put into an issue. And I wasn’t one of those artists who went, ‘What can I get rid of to make it all fit?’ I went, ‘How can I fit all this in?’ I had already developed a reputation for drawing dense pages—and *Inhumans* had incredibly dense pages, as there was so much going on trying to create this new world. Meanwhile, I was trying to live up to the precedents of both Jack and Neal, but with only a short amount of time to do so. For the amount of time it took me to do #1, I was quite proud of myself that I actually came through—and, of course, they asked me to stay on.

“George was near the beginning of his meteoric career... He acquitted himself admirably as we undertook the task of transforming a short-lived 1950s super hero (Marvel Boy) into a psychopathic super villain. And I was glad to have on board Joltin’ Joe Sinnott, by far the best FF inker ever, to keep the characters, especially the tricky rock-like features of Benjamin J. Grimm, consistent with what had been established by Jack Kirby, and later by Johns Romita and Buscema, and then by Rich Buckler.”

— ROY THOMAS



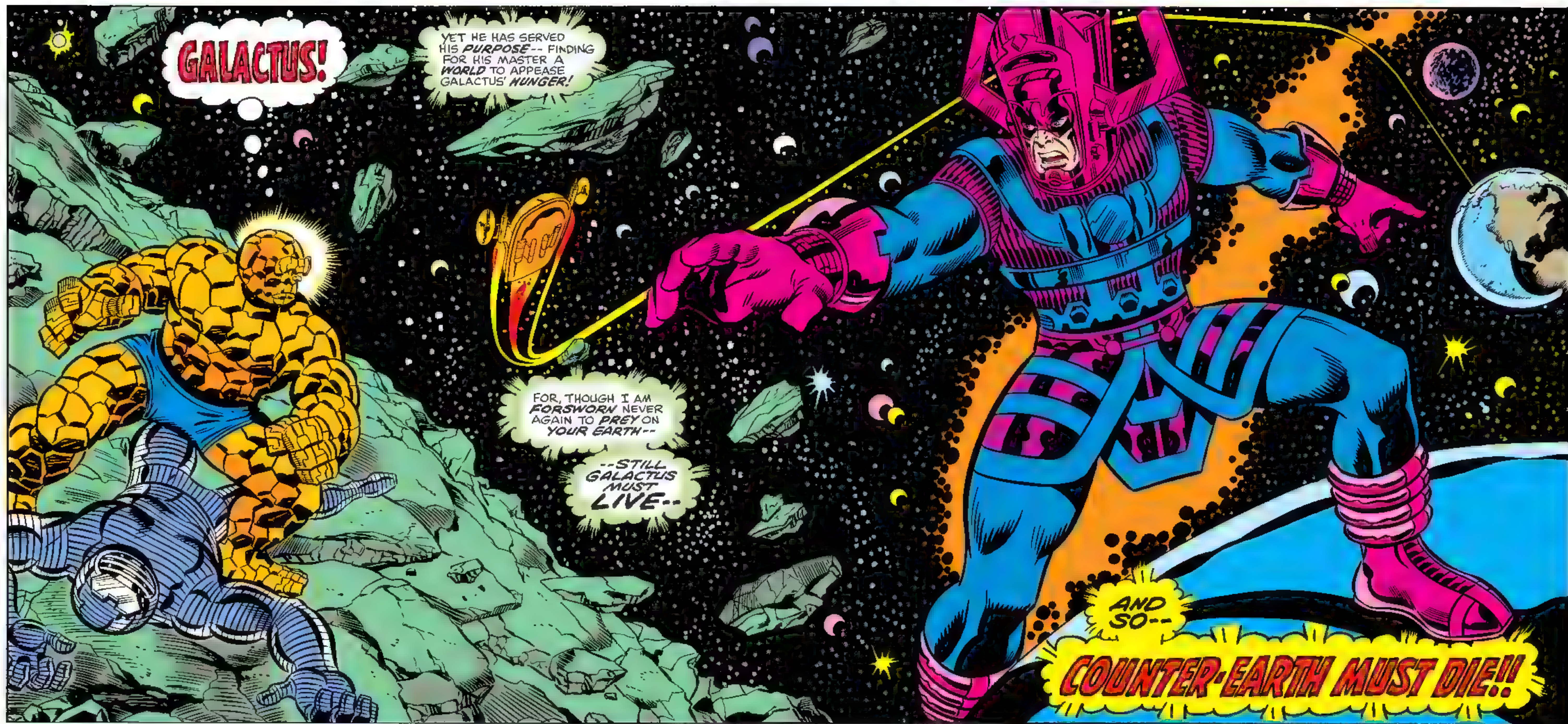
“Many artists consider the Thing the hardest character to draw. I found him the easiest, because he is basically these big shapes. I was trying to capture a bit of Jack Kirby, but at that point the person who gave the more stylistic look to Ben Grimm was Joe Sinnott. My Thing tended to have slightly sharper edges, whereas Joe would round them off a bit. By combining it together we created this interpretation of the Thing that has obviously stood the test of time. Quite frankly, the only person I think did a better version after that was John Byrne.” — **GEORGE PÉREZ**

I did five issues of *Inhumans*, four consecutively and one later, and I had five separate inkers! So, stylistically, it never really quite found its footing. But I was still so tickled by getting any work at Marvel and the fact was that, unlike all the others, this was the first Number One issue I ever had. I still look at those characters fondly.”

Pérez particularly enjoyed drawing Medusa and Triton, explaining: “The more interesting the character is, the more detail I can put into the drawing, the more personality I feel I can bring out to the character.”

He describes Moench—with whom he was now working for a third time—as a “writing machine,” and another huge influence on his approach to the collaboration that is at the heart of comic book production.

“Doug’s scripts were so dense,” Pérez says. “But I learned that, if I was reading a script and I was cursing the name of the writer, I would be a better artist by the time I finished. My whole feeling is I am in service to the story. I want to make sure that, no matter what I put into a page, Doug or whichever writer was there first—I have to do justice to their vision. If I do my work right, I surprise them by giving a little more than they anticipated, to let them know I appreciate and have respect for the work they have put in.



The day I draw a page and the writer has to explain what I have just drawn, then I am not a storyteller. I have to carry the weight of visually telling the story so that the writer can carry the weight of personality and inner thought that cannot be done visually. Then we are both part of that greater whole.”

By the end of 1976, Pérez had drawn his last issue of *Inhumans*, and taken a break from *Fantastic Four*—but he returned to the latter with #174, cover-dated July 1977, beginning another hugely rewarding collaboration with another accomplished writer, Len Wein.

“Len and I met in a park and chatted over ideas for *Fantastic Four*—he had such enthusiasm,” Pérez recalls. “Like Marv Wolfman and most writer/editors, he understood the structure of comics—he knew how to pace a story. That made it easier for me to add a little nuance, or an over-the-top moment, the kind of thing that he could hint at or describe, but only I could make reality. By the time we worked together for a while, Len trusted that I could take the ball and run with it—that no matter what he put in, I’d be willing to draw it. Since he knew I liked teams, he came up with a way of introducing a new group of characters into the story line—and that, of course, became the Salem’s Seven. Len and I worked out what each character could do, and he then tweaked them based on what I drew, to make it a nice combination of his ideas and mine. I think of all the stuff I did on *Fantastic Four*, they are probably the most well-remembered—even though I’ve not touched the characters in over 40 years since!”

In addition to playing to the artist’s strengths with the Salem’s Seven, Wein and Pérez brought back a classic foe, the Molecule Man, having him take over the body of Reed Richards. And, before Pérez took his leave of the book again with #192, they even broke up the FF! Spoiler alert, the team got back together—but Pérez would never return to the main series, though he did illustrate the *Fantastic Four Annuals* in 1979 and 1980.

While he may have begun his work on the title by hewing as close as possible to the “FF style” established by Kirby, Buscema, Romita, Buckler, and, of course, Sinnott before him, by the time Pérez was done he had evolved the look of the team. Indeed, one of his parting gifts to the series was drawing new character heads for the *Fantastic Four* logo. His iconic portraits of Reed, Sue, Ben, and Johnny, introduced on the cover of #190, remained part of the book into the 1980s, when his contemporary, John Byrne, commenced his own acclaimed reinvigoration of the book.

AGAIN I MUST BEG YOUR *PATIENCE*, FOR THAT *NAME OF NAMES* IS BOUND UP IN MY *TALE*!

THE *HIGH EVOLUTIONARY* BROODED OVER THE FATE OF HIS COUNTER-EARTH-- NOW NO *DIFFERENT* FROM ANY OF THE MANY OTHER WORLDS THAT FLOAT THROUGH *SPACE*!

AND I, IN MY *CAGE--BESTIAL AND UN-THINKING--* EVEN I *SENSED HIS... DESIRE!*

FOR, STILL DID HE HUNGER AFTER *PERFECTION!*

STILL DID HE BEAR THE HOPES OF A *GOD!*

AND SO DID HE BEGIN TO CREATE *ANEW--*

--DECIDING TO EVOLVE *PLANTS--VEGETATION--* RATHER THAN *ANIMAL FORMS!*

HE *WORKED* THEN AT THE BUSINESS OF A *CREATOR--* LOCKED SILENT WITHIN THE ARTIFICIAL *ASTEROID* HE'D FASHIONED AS HIS *HOME--*

--UNTIL THE *FEAR* SOUGHT HIM *OUT!*

SKROOM!

SOMETHING HAD STRUCK THE ASTEROID A *GLANCING BLOW--* CUTTING ALL *POWER!*

IT WAS NOT THE *IMPACT* THAT BEGAN TO FILL HIS SOUL WITH *DREAD--* OR THE *DARK--*

--BUT THE FACT THAT THE *ANTI-PARTICLE SHIELDS* HAD BEEN *BREACHED* ABOUT BOTH COUNTER-EARTH AND THE *ASTEROID!*

IT WAS BUT THE WORK OF A *MOMENT* TO ACTIVATE THE *VIEWSCREENS!*

A MOMENT WHEREIN THE *CREATOR* MOUTHED *WORDS* WHOSE MEANING I ONLY *LATER* CAME TO *UNDERSTAND!*

FOR, THE WORDS WERE THOSE OF A *PRAYER* COMMON TO THE WORLD OF HIS *BIRTH!*

YOUR WORLD, *HUMANS!*

FOR, DURING THOSE FEW MOMENTS WHEN IT WAS POSSIBLE--THE *DESTROYER* HAD *SENSED* THE *EXISTENCE* OF COUNTER-EARTH!

THE *DESTROYER--* HE WHOM, AS YOU DOUBTLESS KNOW, HAS BECOME THE SKY-SPANNING HERALD OF *GALACTUS!* *

*SEE *THOR** 228.--R.T.

I... *SCREAMED* AS MY GENES WALKED THE PATH OF *MILLENNIA* IN MERE *SECONDS!*

SCREAMED AT THE BIRTH OF *THOUGHTS* WITHIN ME I HAD NEVER BEFORE *KNOWN!*

WITH AN *URGENCY* SUCH AS I HAD NEVER *SEEN* IN HIM, HE LED ME TO THE *SLAB!*

AND WHEN THE PROCESS WAS *DONE--* AND I WAS MADE TO *UNDERSTAND* ALL THERE WAS TO *KNOW--*

--THE *CREATOR* DISPATCHED ME TO SEEK *AID!*

FROM THE *FIRST EARTH!* FROM THOSE WHO HAD FACED THE *FEAR--*

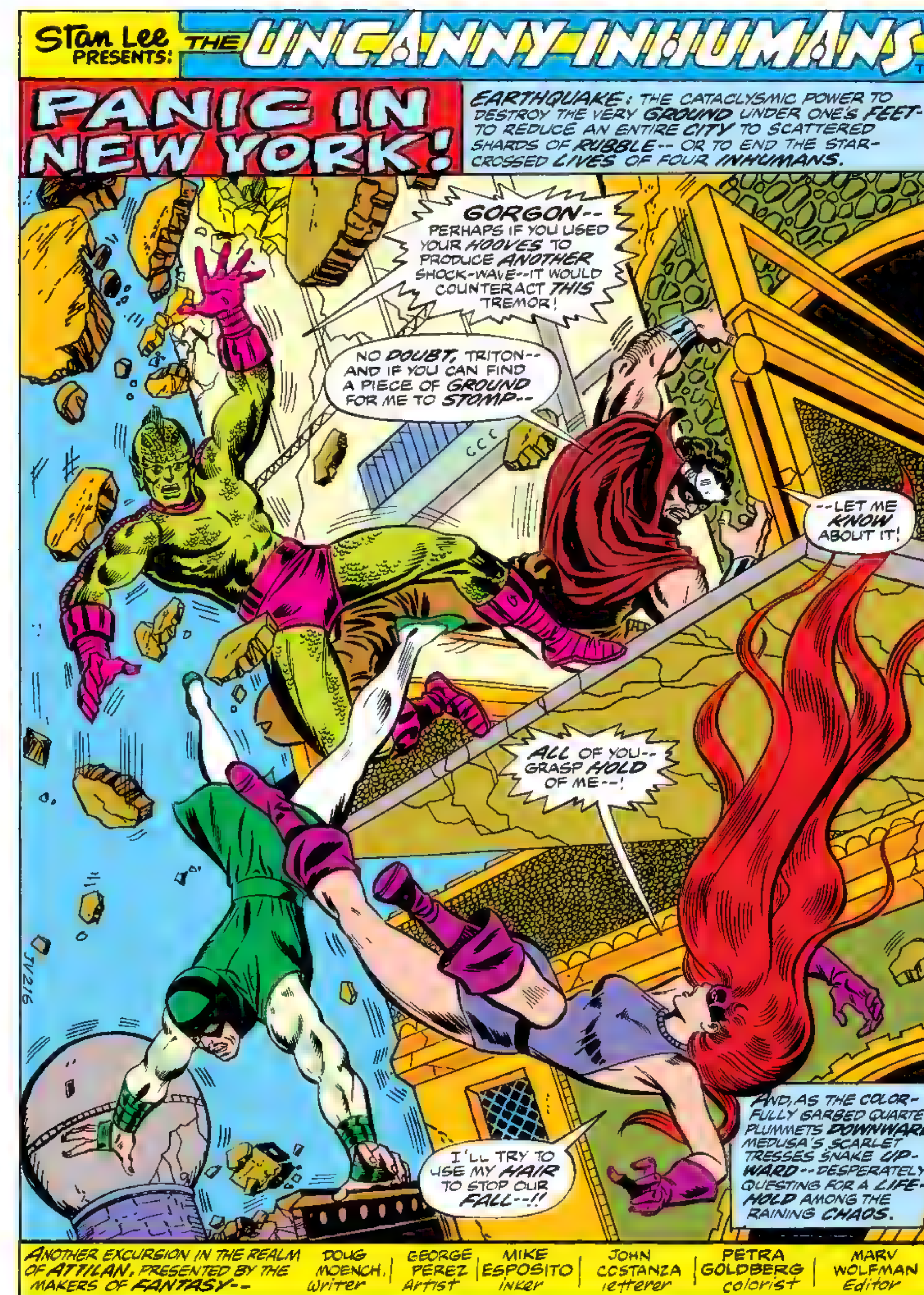
--AND *TRUMPHEED* OVER IT!

THAT'S QUITE A *STORY*, GORR--

--- BUT WE'RE STILL YOUR *PRISONERS*, AND THAT MAKES *BELIEVING* JUST A LITTLE BIT... *DIFFICULT!*



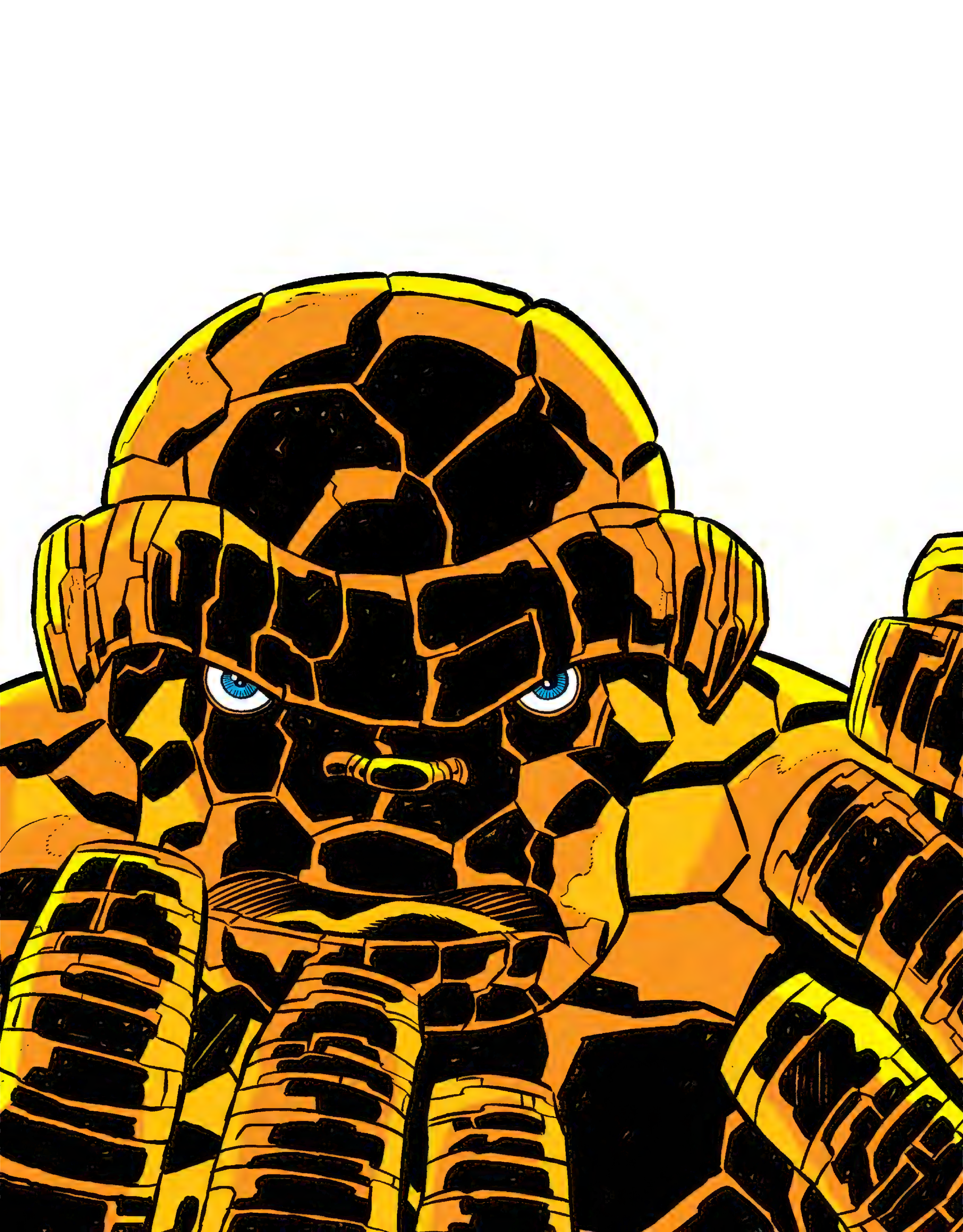
Pérez had played a vital role in taking the characters that ushered in the Marvel Age of Comics, and bringing them firmly into the modern era—something that Pérez can only acknowledge in hindsight. “At the time, I didn’t see that I was actually doing anything that was radically different, because I was still developing my style. Comic book historians have told me my influence is there in my sense of page design and the amount of extra detail I would put in. Jack put a lot of detail in, but he also tended to stay within the structure of the grid. I was more inspired by people like Neal Adams, Gene Colan, and others who broke up that rigid grid format. I was putting more panels on a page than almost anyone else, because I was influenced by people like Barry Windsor-Smith and Jim Steranko, who managed to put tiny panels in and put a lot more story into a page. I think, without realizing it, that was something I brought to the FF that really wasn’t

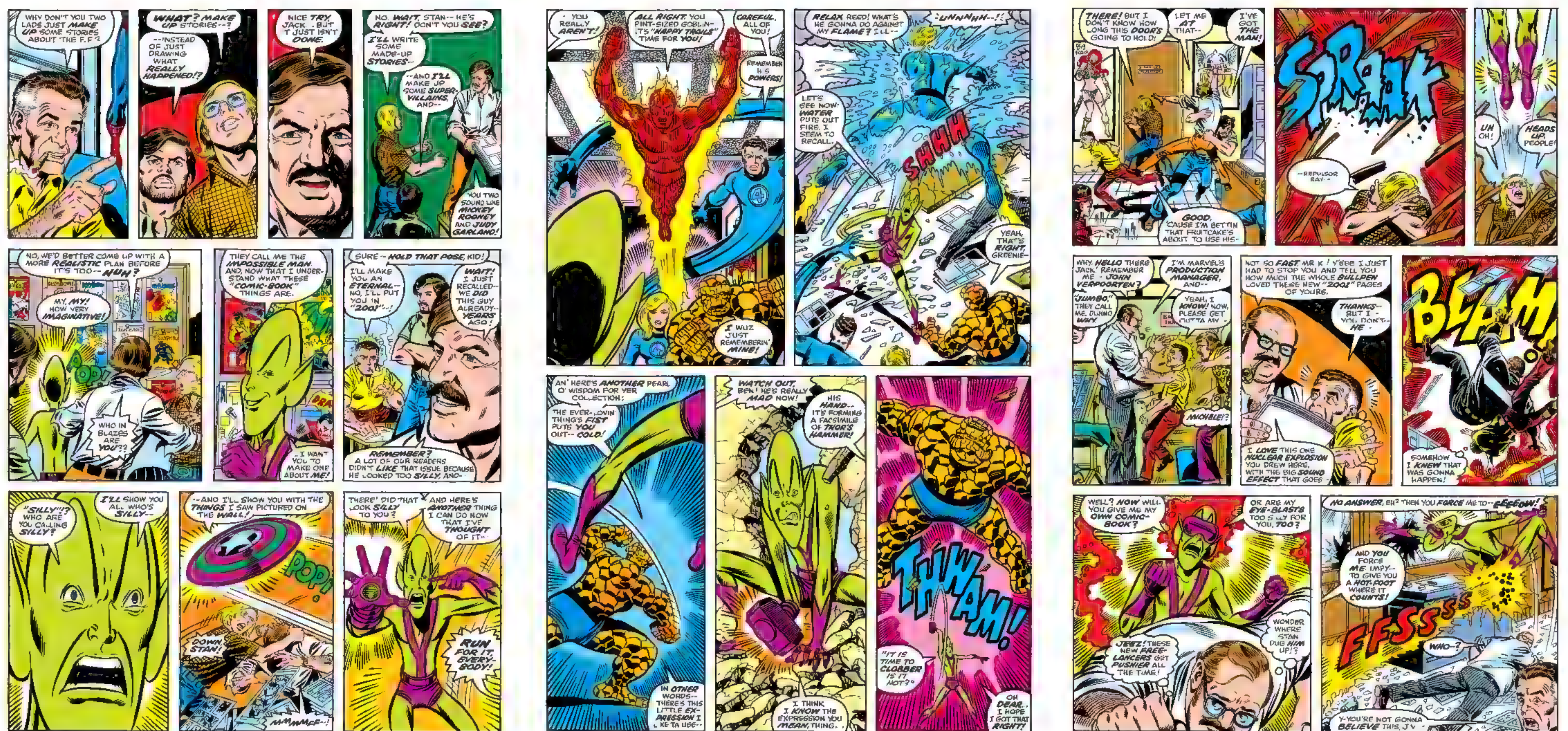
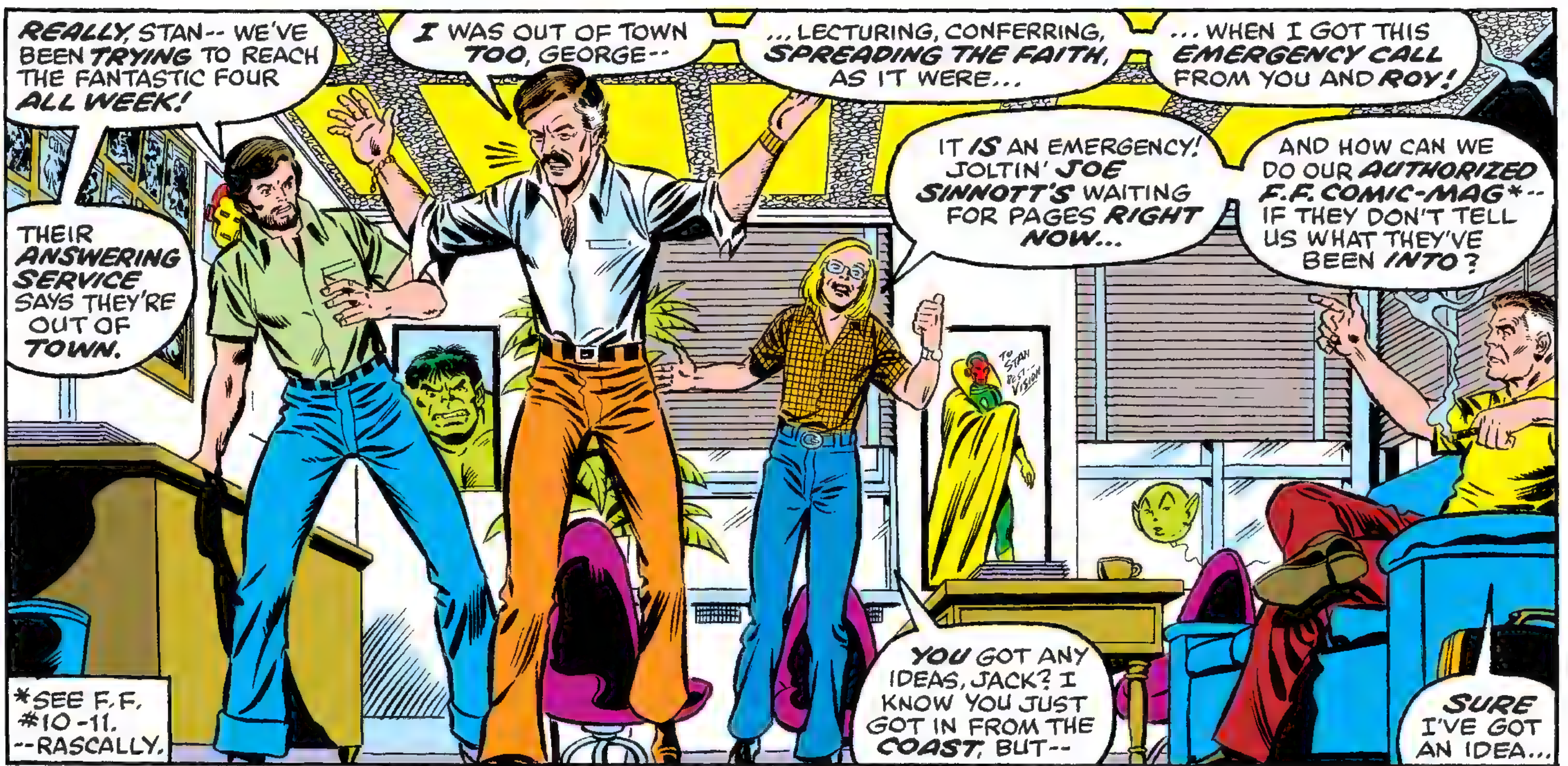


“I wrote George Pérez’s very first published work. He was very shy and humble. I remember telling him, keep it up—you could do this for real. I knew he had what it took to be a professional, but I didn’t know then that he would become *that* good. He was perfect for *Inhumans*. George looked on them as some of his very favorite Marvel characters and was tickled pink at the prospect of tackling them. For some reason, when you have a bunch of costumed characters, that’s when George really shines.” — DOUG MOENCH

there before—that modern sensibility. But it was just me filling up a page because I wanted to tell more story! Instead of having a group reaction, I wanted to have individual reactions by moving the camera around, putting a close-up in to break up the medium shots and other cinematic tricks. It was a natural progression for me and so it wasn’t until people doing retrospectives about my career pointed it out to me that I realized. I thought I was trying to fit in and look the same, never realizing that I actually did something that would stand out.”

Stand out his FF work most certainly did—and it remains a firm favorite with fans decades later. When his run was collected in 2005, it was no hyperbole that the book titles recognized Pérez as a “Fantastic Four Visionary.”





“George and I pulled out all the stops and even had Impy pay a visit to the mighty Marvel offices. He even interrupted a conference of Stan, Jack, George, and myself—four individuals who in real life were never in the same room at the same time. George also excelled at drawing production manager (and my good friend) John Verpoorten, a few other guys (including Len Wein, John Romita, and Editor in Chief Archie Goodwin), and the Marvel offices themselves.” — ROY THOMAS

“George penciled the first Marvel comic I actually purchased (*Fantastic Four* #177)... It was my first foray into the Marvel Universe, and I couldn’t have asked for a better tour guide. The scope was vast, and yet the visuals were grounded in reality.”
— TOM BREVOORT

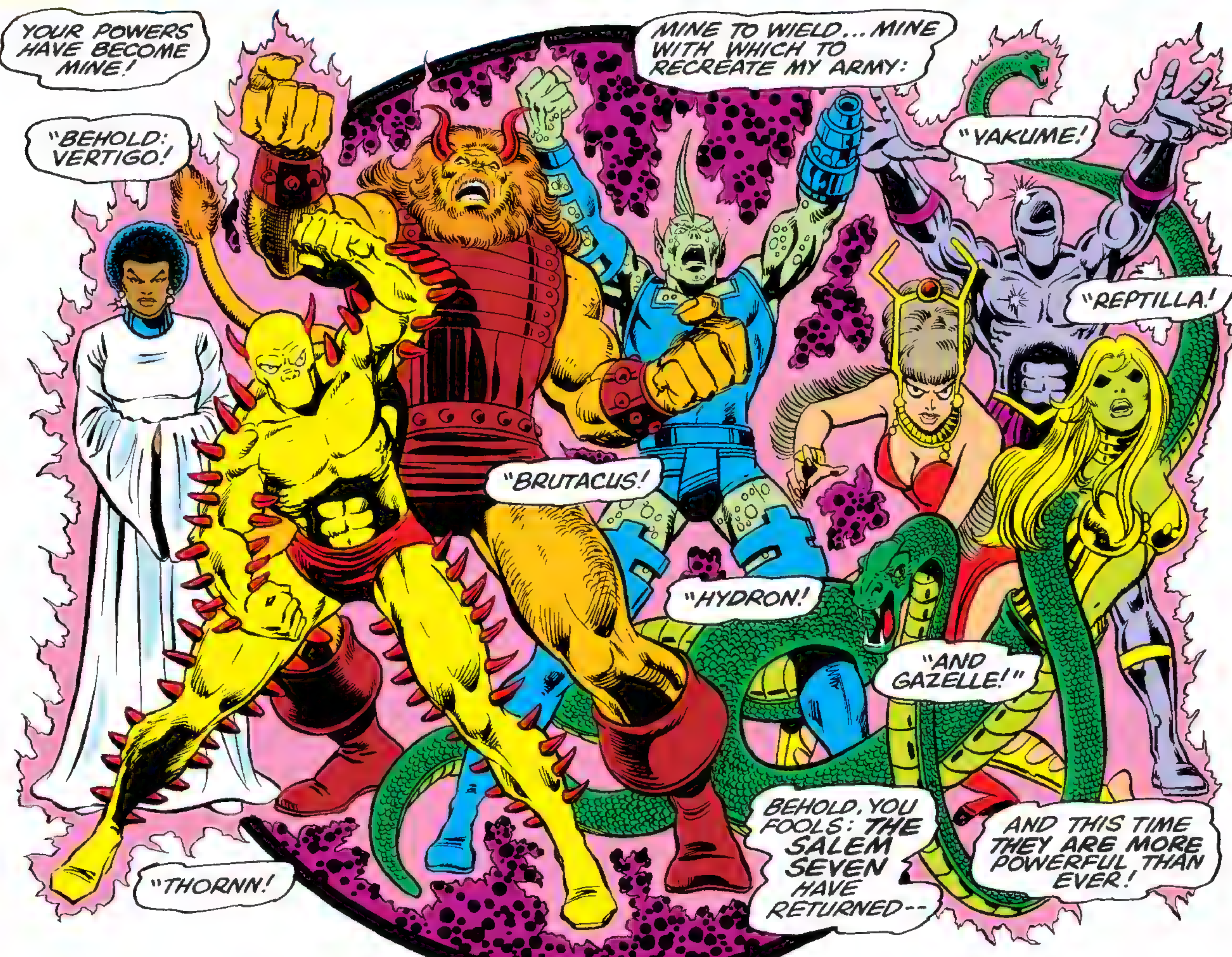
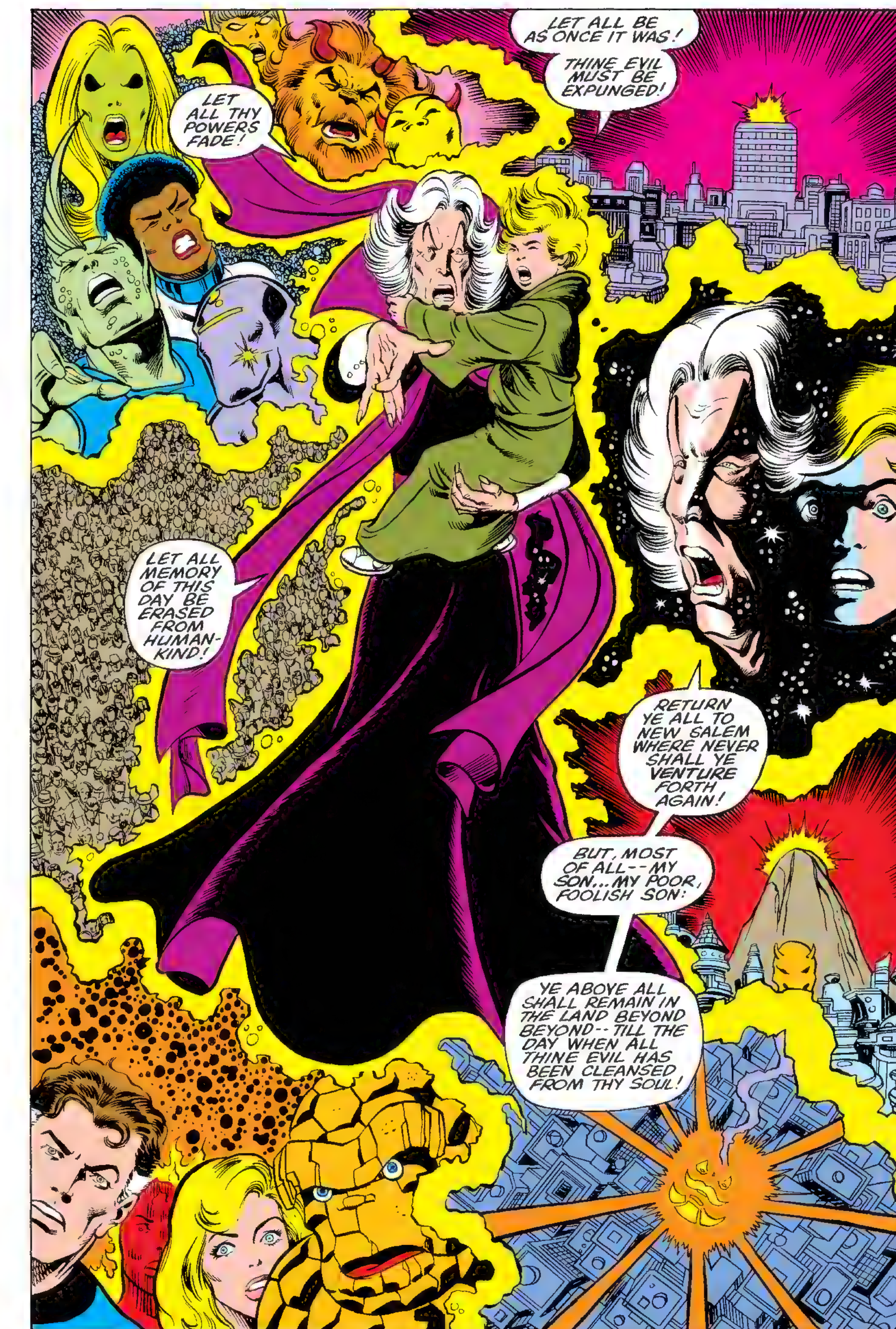




**THIS ONE
HAS IT
ALL!!!**



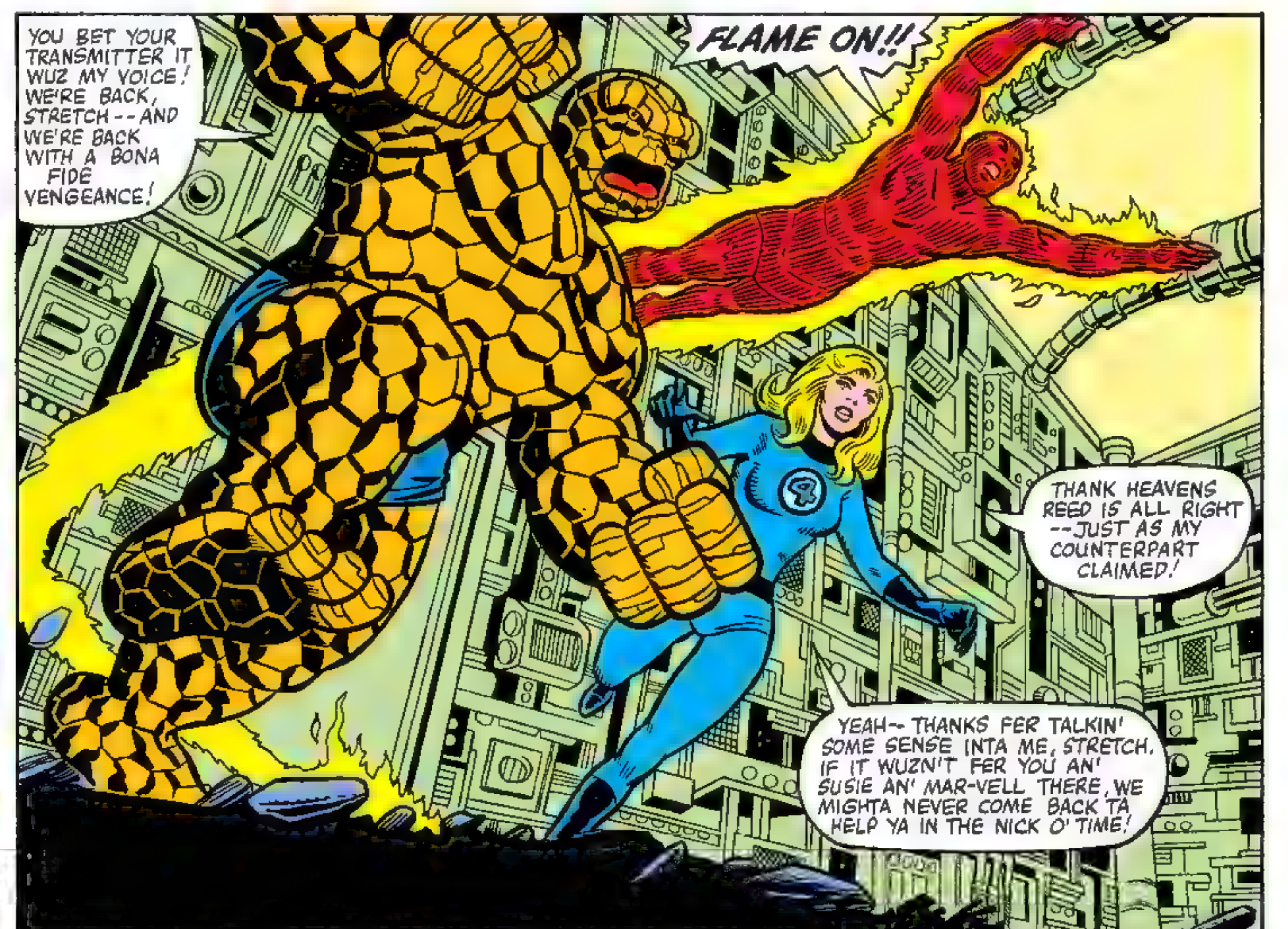
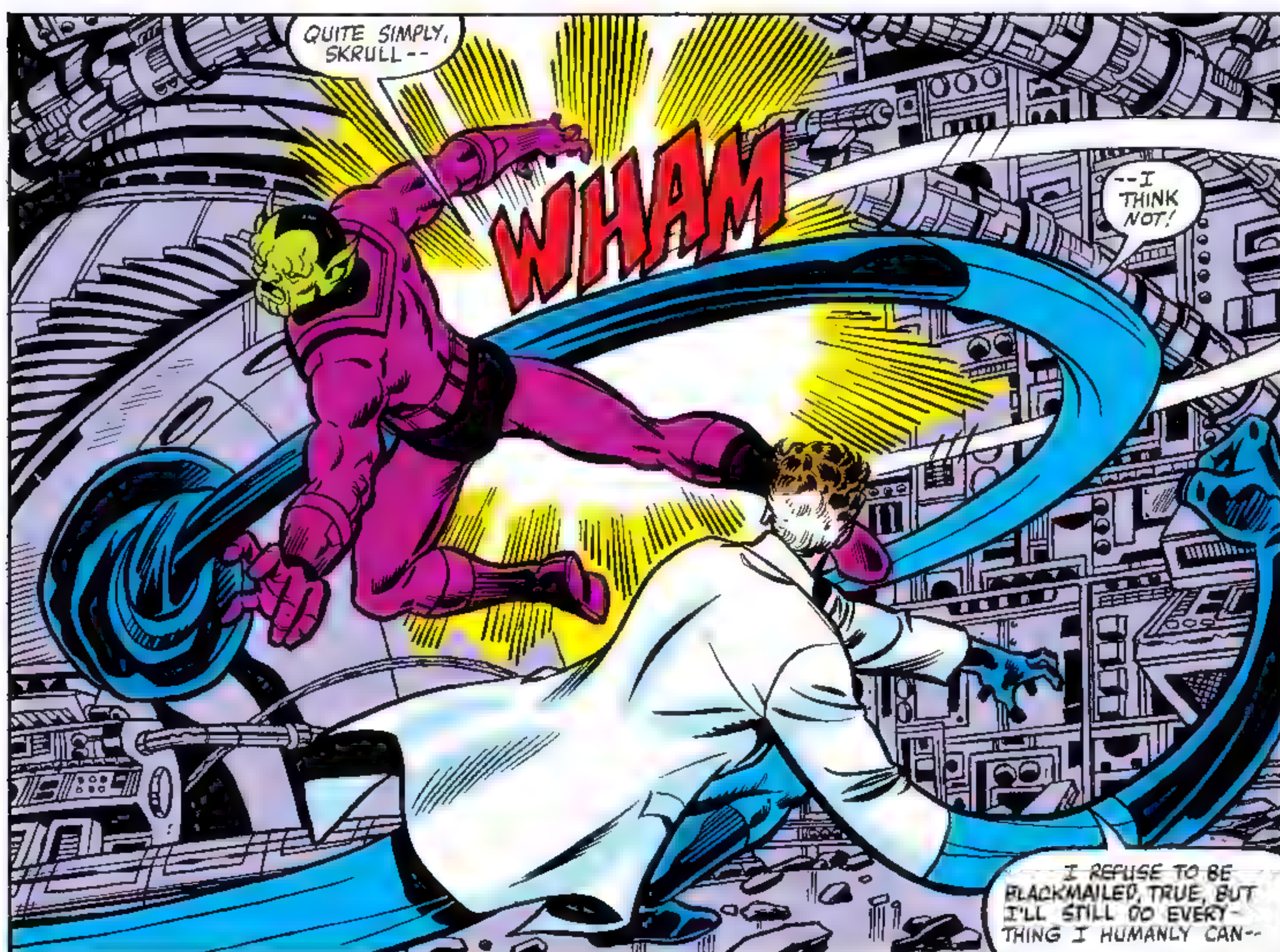
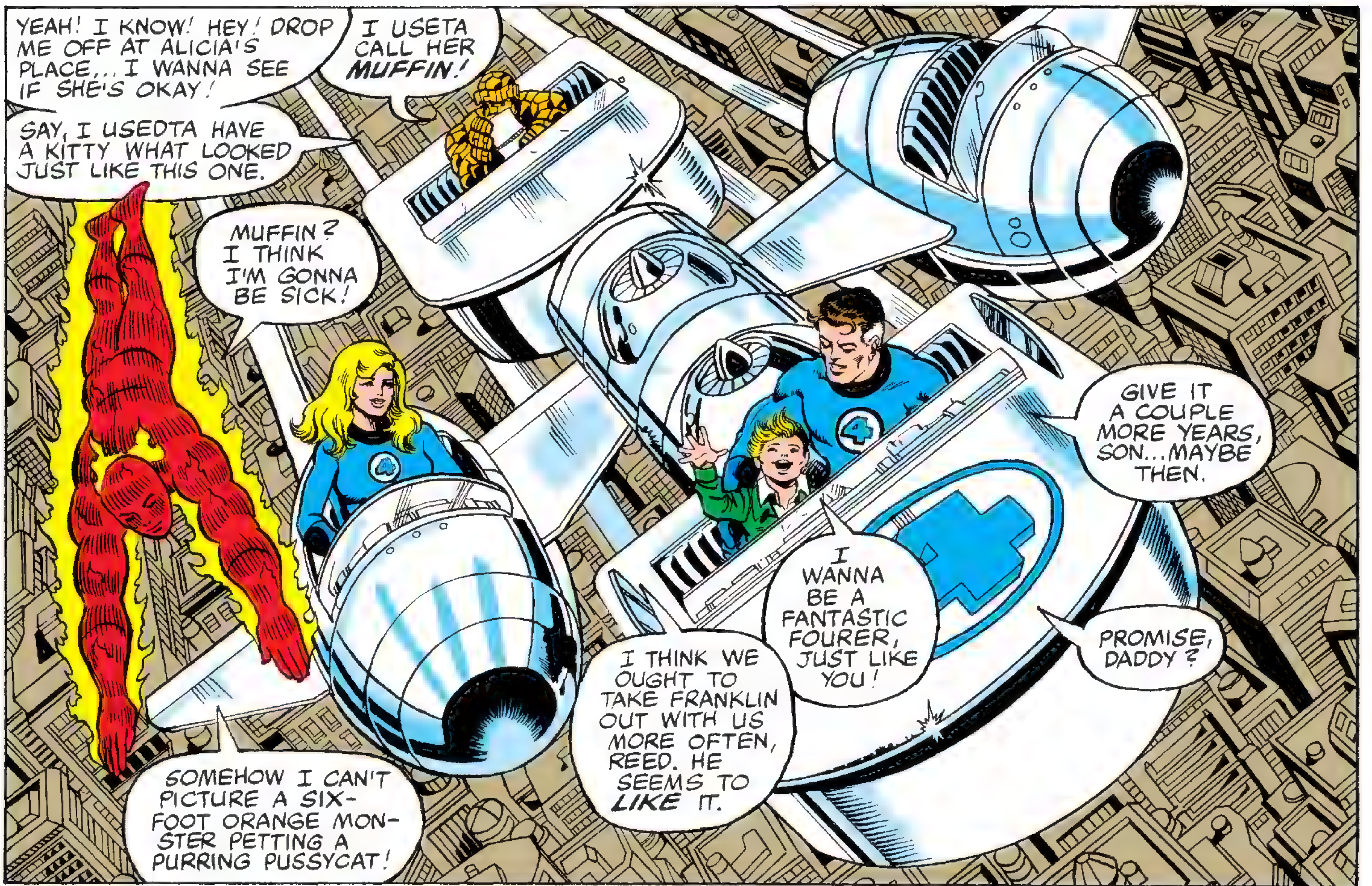
“Salem’s Seven were one of the first team of characters I ever created. Len came up with the prototypes and the names and most of them were designed as I drew the book. I did it all by instinct—and of course they benefited from Joe Sinnott. I was inspired by whatever Len wrote and all the artists that preceded me and I just worked from there. One of the things I don’t spend much time doing, sometimes to my own detriment, is designing the characters. I admire the fact that Jack Kirby seldom spent a lot of time. He just put it on paper. He had an incredible design sense.” — GEORGE PÉREZ





"I was fortunate enough to take over the book just as my old friend and legendary penciler George Pérez was returning to the FF. We had the best time playing in that particular sandbox."

— LEN WEIN







CHAPTER THREE

EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

“Fantastic Four was a top-tier book... but the one I really wanted was Avengers.”

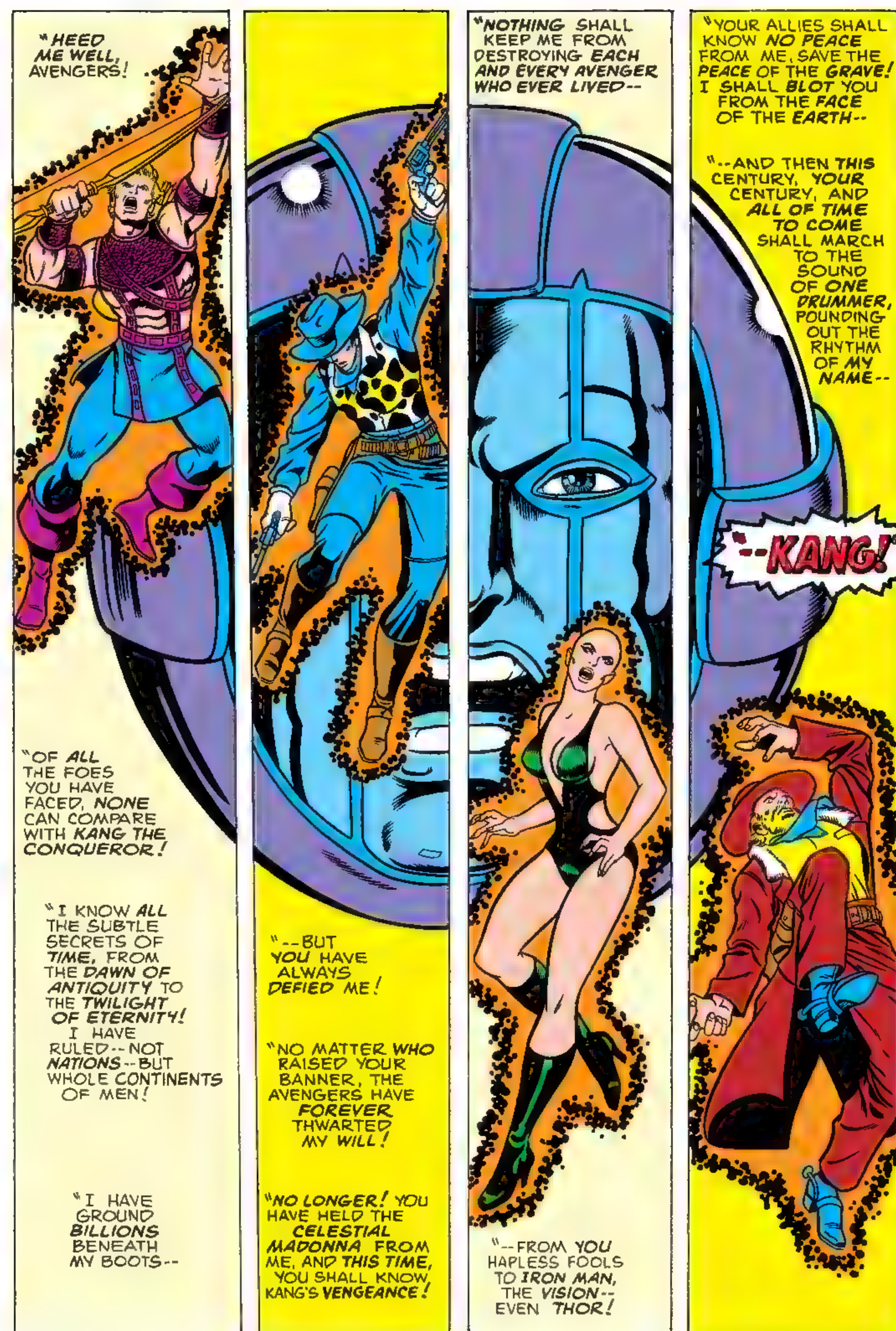
Fortunately for Pérez, things were moving pretty fast as his career kicked into high gear. Quicksilver fast. So much so that his first issue of *Avengers*, #141, was also cover-dated November 1975—the same month as the rescheduled story that became his *Fantastic Four* debut, and following hot on the heels of October’s *Inhumans* #1. Pérez had spent his whole life fascinated with super-teams, and now, within a matter of weeks, he was drawing three. As far as many other artists of the era were concerned, he was welcome to them.

“I ended up getting *Avengers* for the same reason I was getting other books,” Pérez says. “Artists were either going on vacation, or didn’t want to stay on the book. At that time, there were no royalties, so you got the same page rate whether you did a book with a single lead or a book with multiple characters. Those were the books I enjoyed as a reader and, when I went into the industry, those were the books I wanted to do. But almost every artist who had been working on any of those titles was more than happy to cede those books!”

In this case, it was George Tuska’s vacation that opened the door—and, on his return, the veteran gladly stood aside. Pérez joined the book three years in to writer Steve Englehart’s celebrated run, which had brought a wealth of fresh ideas, not least the recently completed “Celestial Madonna Saga.” Englehart’s creativity met its perfect partner in the young artist seizing his dream.

“Steve was a wonderfully imaginative writer,” Pérez says. “He challenged me from the very beginning. Here was my first issue of *Avengers*, drawing the Squadron Supreme and all these super heroes, then what does he do in the second issue?



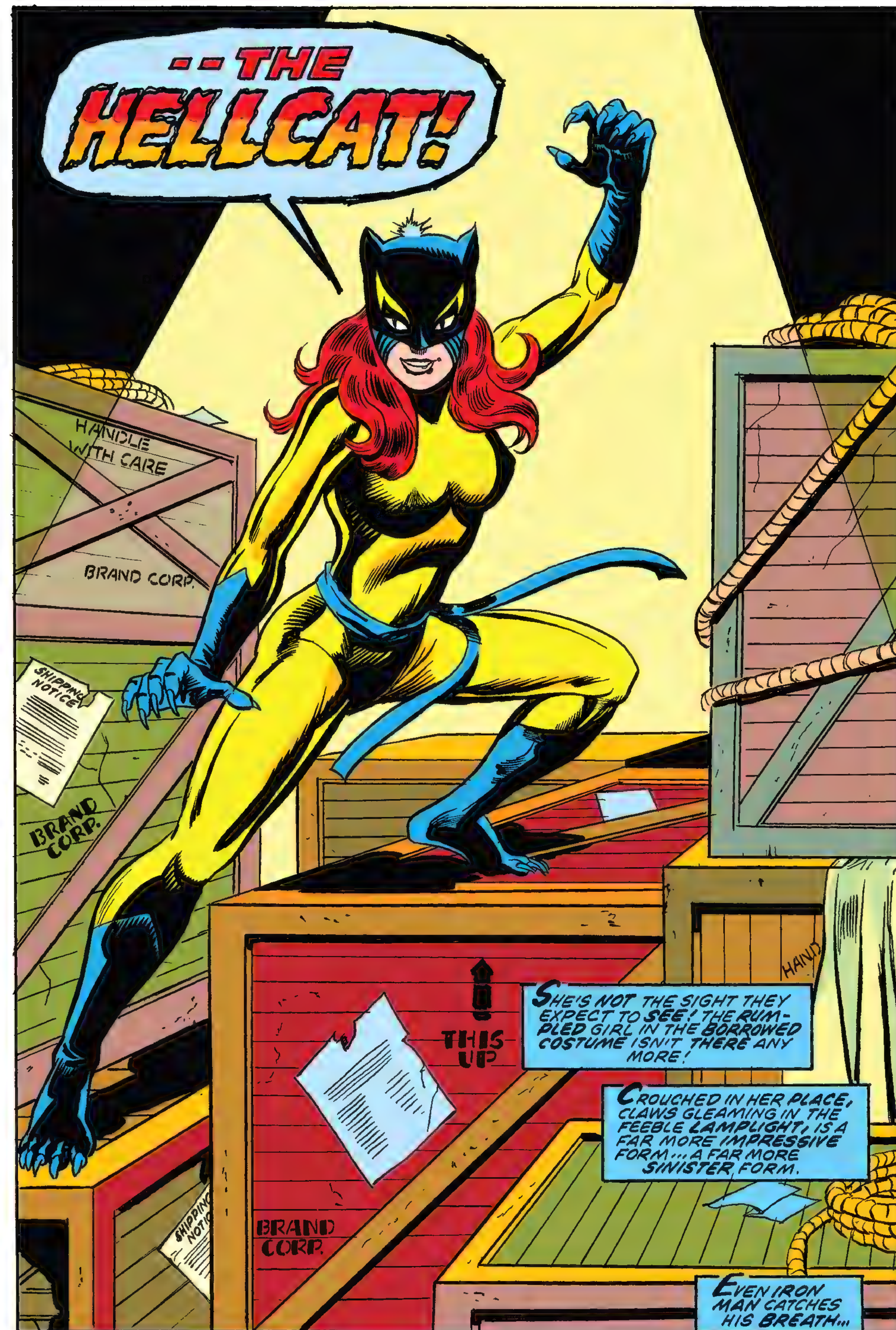


Throw them all into the Old West! I now had to draw things like horses. It was like an actor being offered this wonderfully plum part in a Western movie and asked, ‘Can you ride a horse?’ He will lie through his teeth and then learn how to ride. It was fun, challenging, and something totally unexpected—and definitely a testimony to the creativeness of Steve Englehart. Meanwhile, what I lacked in actual ability, as I was still learning, I made up for in sheer enthusiasm. I was on the *Avengers*—this was home!”

For Englehart, it didn’t take long to realize: “This guy gets it.”

The writer feels that, on *Avengers*, he did not always work with the “absolute best Marvel had to offer,” as there were people above him in the hierarchy who got first pick of artists. “But when George came on,” he says, “as with Paul Gulacy on *Master of Kung Fu*, I learned the joys of getting the new guys who were working every day to get to be the best. George started out like a talented newcomer, but every issue he got better and better, because he put energy into it. It was fun to watch him develop, sometimes page-by-page. George can not only draw anything, he likes drawing *everything*. But beyond that, he does characterization, so that each one of the thousand people he’d drawn is an individual. That’s not a universal thing, and comics can get by just fine without it (if the story provides it), but getting it from the artist kicks things up another notch.”

In addition to a well-matched collaborator, Pérez also had the ideal roster to play with: “I really wanted to draw the core characters that I grew up with. Captain America, Thor, Iron Man...even if Iron Man had the hideous nose at the time...the Vision and, of course, Scarlet Witch. They were all there.”



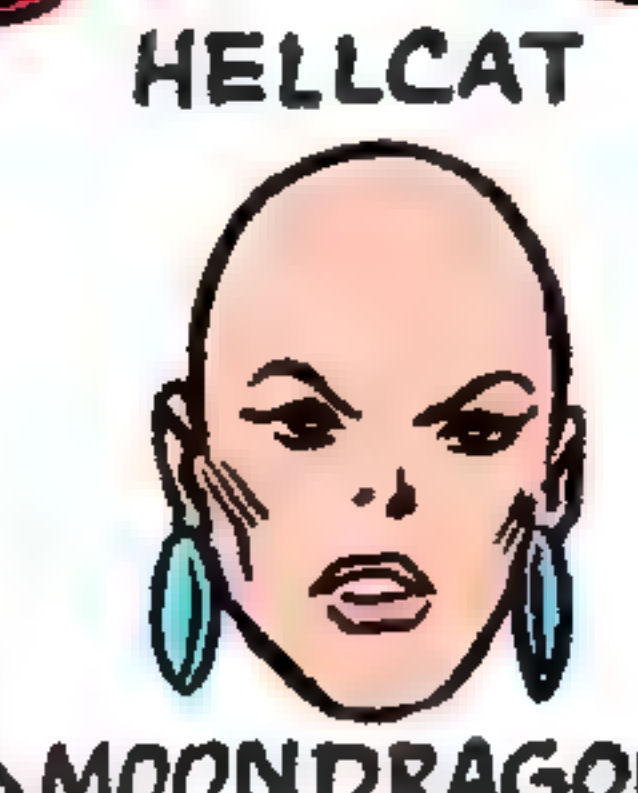
“Steve came up with this wonderful idea of merging Patsy Walker and the character of the Cat, and creating Hellcat. That full-page introduction, one of the rare full pages I could do at the time, has become iconic now. The idea of doing something from the romance books and incorporating into the *Avengers*? That was gutsy.”

— GEORGE PÉREZ

MEMBERSHIP SQUADRON SUPREME



MEMBERSHIP AVENGERS



"You're looking at a guy figuring things out right before your eyes in George Pérez. His evolution into *the* George Pérez is beginning as he goes, and that's the point: he's going forward. George has never said, 'That's good enough.' He has always striven for more. We can easily say that now, because we've seen it—but he was saying it then, right before your eyes." — STEVE ENGLEHART



Englehart and Pérez also added a brand-new hero into the mix, bringing back 1940s romance comics star Patsy Walker in the costumed guise of Hellcat in *Avengers* #144. But perhaps the one Avenger with which Pérez would become most synonymous, at least in this era, was a recent addition to the lineup—a former X-Man who had undergone a physical transformation in *Amazing Adventures*. Enter, the Beast.

"He was pretty much a fresh character at the time," Pérez says. "It was a new look for the Beast, and I was one of the early artists to draw him in a major comic series, as *Avengers* was an 'A' book. I made him short. He was a monkey man and his shortness was emphasized by the fact that his arms were long. Large hands, short legs—like an ape."

The simian appearance contrasted with Hank McCoy's brilliant mind, sharp wit, and boundless enthusiasm for life as a super hero. Through Pérez's pencil, the blue, furry Beast would rarely stand still—instead, he would always be leaping, bouncing, or balancing on one hand...with a fanged smile that could light up a page. Together with subsequent writers, primarily David Michelinie, Pérez went on to pair the Beast with Wonder Man in one of comics' most believable friendships—which he describes as "one of the great bromances—Bill and Ted before Bill and Ted."

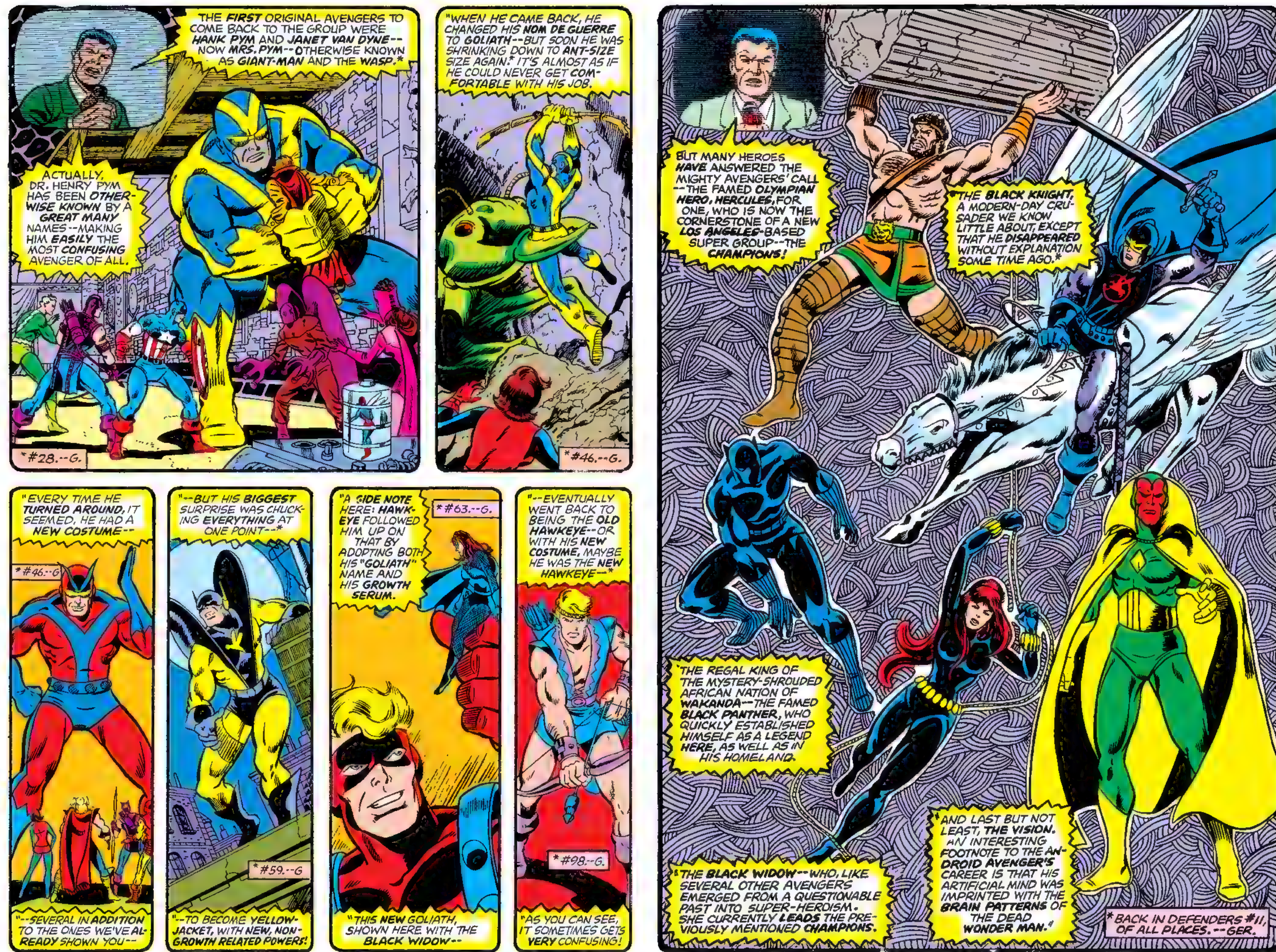
Thanks to Pérez and his collaborators, for a whole generation of readers, Hank's true place will never be with the X-Men. Once an Avenger, always an Avenger, after all.

The sense of personality he brought to the Beast was something that Pérez, now honing his craft across multiple titles, began to imbue into each member of the team's colorful cast.

"I started to pay a lot more attention to the body language of the characters," he explains. "I wanted to make them distinct from each other. How do I cast them, how do I make them different? One of the things I started developing was the side view, with one character reacting to another. The intention was never that the character should be saying anything—I wanted the character to react to the scene he is watching. It was like being the director of a play and keeping the person in the scene. If they all spoke, there would be nothing but word balloons everywhere, but they should all be in the scene and interacting."

"I first discovered George's art on *Avengers*. At the time, during the Englehart years, that was my favorite comic going. His detail. The density. Comic storytelling is about the economy of language, and I was stunned at how much storytelling George could pack into a single page." — MARK WAID

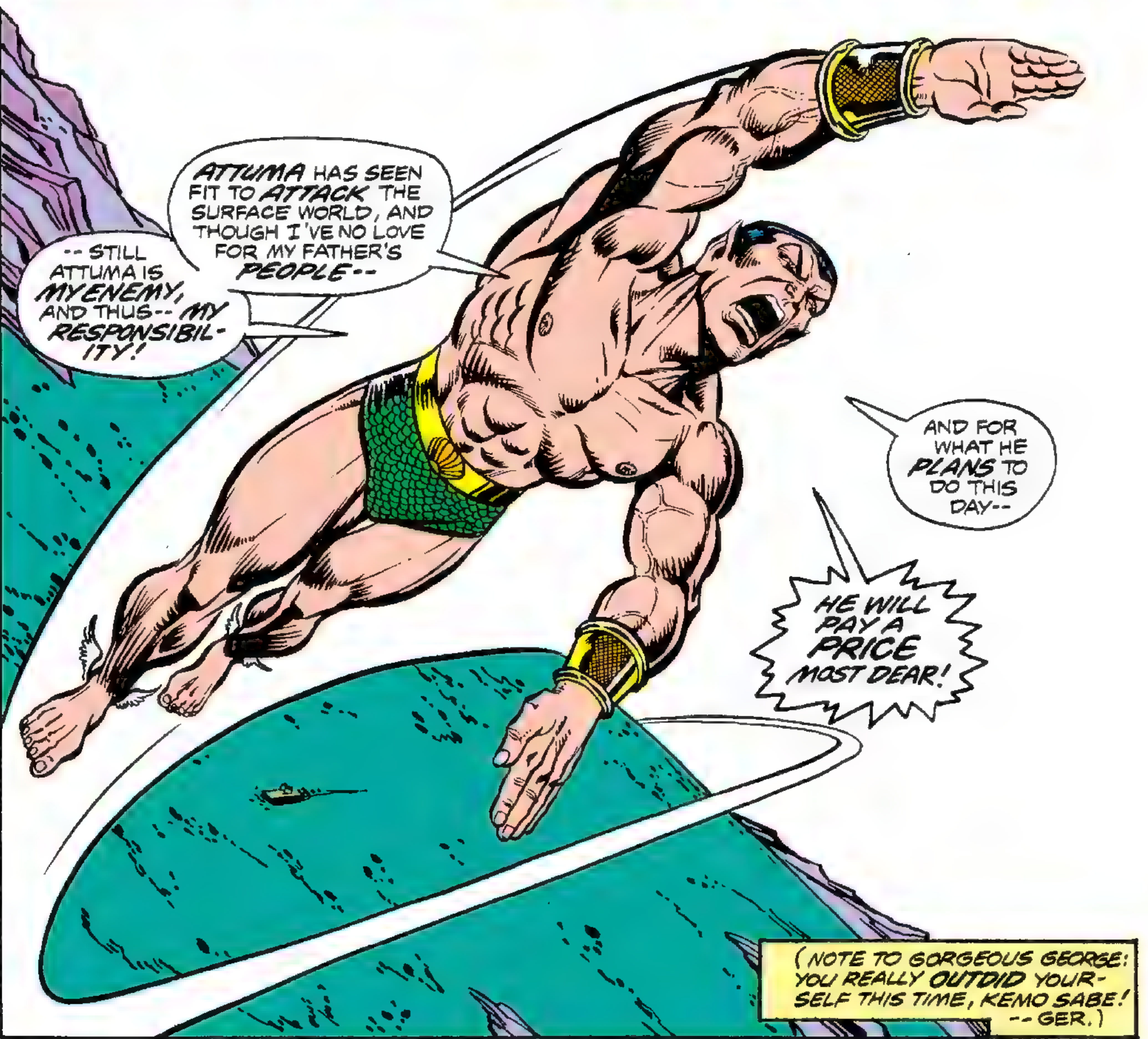




While the Fantastic Four are a family, the Avengers are a team of disparate heroes—sometimes “unwilling teammates”—and Pérez would capture that in his depictions, right down to the way individual characters stood. “If Iron Man is there, he acts like Iron Man. If Captain America is there, he acts like Cap,” he says. “That’s something that seemed to catch the fans’ eyes, my storytelling. I was doing it out of love, and Marv Wolfman told me that’s what made me valuable to Marvel. The late Ross Andru made the comment that I was born to be a comic book artist. It was what I was genuinely good at and I could do it by instinct. I did not need to sweat a page. I knew how to lay out a page, tell a story visually, and be able to juggle a large cast of characters.”

However, doing so each month across multiple books, while working hard to improve his anatomy work and adding ever more detail to his pencils, began to take its toll on Pérez, who at this point was drawing two or three pages per day, earning him the Bullpen nickname George “Pacesetter” Pérez (at least, when he wasn’t being called “Gorgeous” George.) In the same way that his *Fantastic Four* run was interrupted, he never managed to illustrate more than five issues in a row during the five years that mark his classic *Avengers* run—which, following Englehart’s departure, included collaborations with Gerry Conway, Jim Shooter, and Michelinie.

“My love for the characters drove me through some long nights with books that were running late,” he says. “Other artists would say, if you put in less, no one is going to notice what you’ve left out—but I would, because then it would be like phoning it in.”





“One of the masters of detail who inspired me was Barry Windsor-Smith,” Pérez says. “You saw how the more ornate his work got, the slower he got and the more sporadic his output became. The same thing happened with me, doing all the team books. I suffered burnout at a very young age.”

During 1976, his own body gave him a warning that something had to change. “I started to lose sensation in my hands,” he recalls. “I had pains in my back and I couldn’t feel anything. I would shower and I couldn’t feel the water hitting my body. I thought my career was over at the ripe old age of 22.” Thankfully, his condition was diagnosed as a pinched nerve, treatable with electro-massage therapy. “Archie Goodwin, the Editor in Chief, had Marvel pay for my medical bills, because, at the time there was no medical insurance. From that point on, I really, *really* appreciated what I was doing—because, at a young age, I could have lost it all. Thanks to Marvel, thanks to their generous support, I was able to continue with my career. But, because I almost lost it, I had to be better.”

Taking a break from both *Fantastic Four* and *Avengers*, Pérez took on a licensed adaptation of the movie *Logan’s Run*, and credits it as a major step forward in his artistic evolution. “I had to really use a lot of reference and I became enamored with the idea of trying to make things look real. Jack Kirby’s buildings were always interesting, but they weren’t real. I realized that, to give a sense of verisimilitude to my work, I really should start learning how to draw real places, real situations. I became addicted to it and I thought, this is fun, this is challenging, and I felt I became a better artist. I found myself buying more books on architecture, on clothing, on landscapes, all these things gave me a better sense of reality in my work. There is a line that I used to use when telling people learning how to draw people and make them look real: for every Superman there is a Clark Kent. You have to be able to draw someone that a super hero can look super against. They have to be credible. If everyone looks like they can take down a building, then nobody looks super. That’s what I really learned in *Logan’s Run* and it was a turning point in my artistic career.”

Returning to *Avengers* with Jim Shooter as writer, Pérez was determined to “really knock it out of the park.” Together, they added yet more characters to the book, with the arrival of the future freedom fighters, the Guardians of the Galaxy, for the epic story line that has come to be known as “The Korvac Saga.”

“It was a golden time for us and Jim and I developed this great working relationship,” Pérez says. “I always found it funny, I don’t think Jim ever really learned how to use a typewriter. He always wrote his scripts on yellow legal pads. Since most of his earlier work was at DC, he wasn’t

as versed in all of the characters, so he gave me a lot of free rein in interpreting his work. He trusted my knowledge of the Avengers. Jim was very generous in his praise of my work and made me feel part of the creative process.”

Pérez also heaps praise on inker Pablo Marcos as one of a growing number of embellishers he began to work with, including Joe Rubinstein and Dan Green, who respected him as an artist with an established style, and knew they were there to bring the best out of his pencils.

“Pablo was fearless,” Pérez says. “He loved inking me and he always put that extra bit of work in that I used to appreciate.”

However, as much as he enjoyed the collaboration—and the unfolding cosmic drama that pitted an inflated roster of Avengers and Guardians against the vastly powerful Michael Korvac—once again Pérez had to step away from the title.

“I had some difficulties at the time personally,” he says, “and sometimes you just can’t explain why you are losing your momentum. Maybe the sheer burnout of so many years of doing so much high-intensity work. Poor Jim, he and I could see us doing this massive story together and I had to bow out and other artists ended up finishing ‘The Korvac Saga.’ That was the start of what I consider my ‘Orson Welles reputation,’ where people couldn’t deny my talent and my ability, but they were starting to doubt my ability to finish. ‘The Korvac Saga’ is one of my regrets—I really wish I could have finished that.”

Nevertheless, Pérez remains a major part of the success of what has become one of the most popular and acclaimed *Avengers* stories ever told—one that has been reprinted many times, often with his unmistakable artwork on the covers.

He returned to the book in 1980, teaming with Michelinie for a short run that nevertheless included several highlights. In addition to the Beast/Wonder Man double act, they also introduced the enduringly popular villain the Taskmaster, put Wasp in perhaps her most eye-catching costume of all, gave Jarvis the starring role on a cover (and his own short story), and, along with other writers, produced the landmark #200.



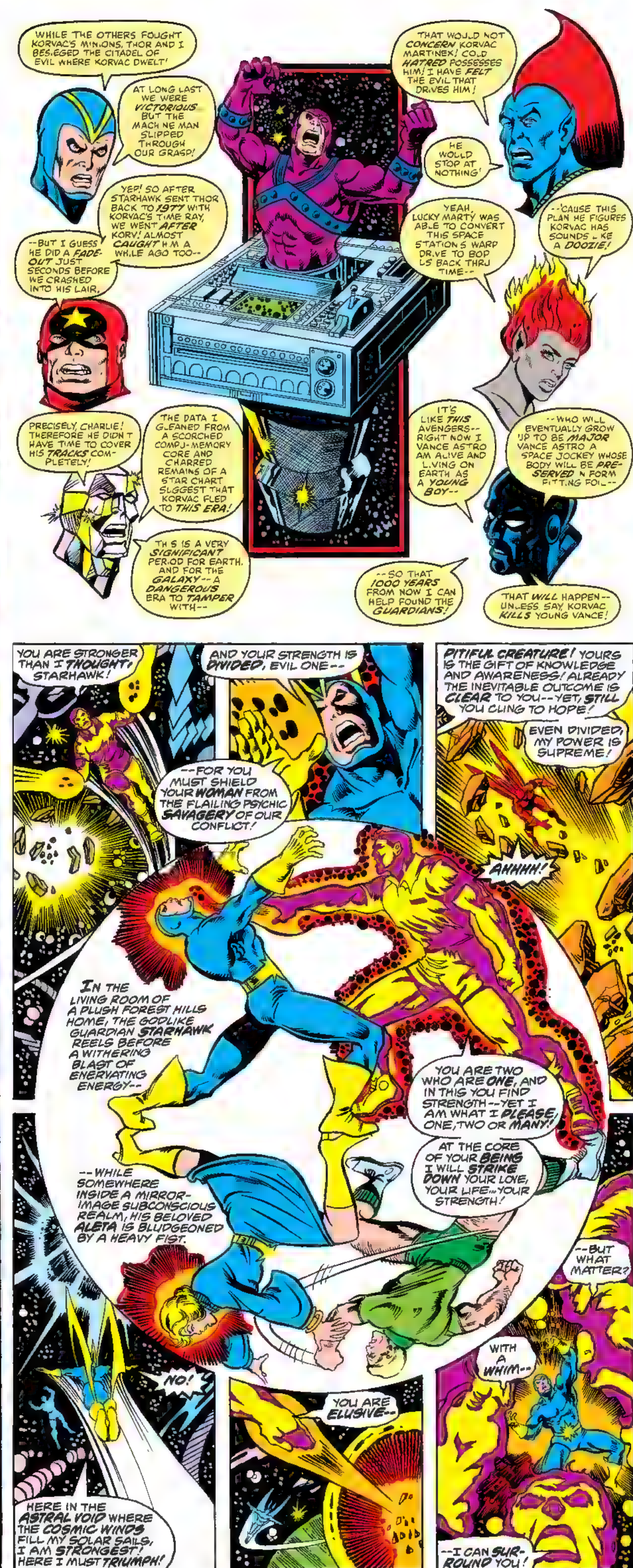


“*Avengers* #161 was a fan-favorite cover that showed Ant-Man attacking the Avengers, Scarlet Witch in the foreground with all these ants crawling over her body. But, as I wasn’t really an entomologist or anything, I drew all these ants with eight legs instead of six. Mut-ants! But only a couple of fans spotted that.” — **GEORGE PÉREZ**

Michelinie, who has worked with many of the industry’s finest talents, wants his artists to follow plots accurately and tell the story clearly, with everything else “just icing on the cake.” Of Pérez, he says: “George’s superb character depiction, detailed environments, and exciting take on action made for some tasty icing indeed. Handsome men, beautiful women, action that draws a reader along between the ‘talky bits,’ and a story told clearly and powerfully—what more could you ask for?”

What more, indeed. Across five years on and off the book, Pérez drew his name into legend and staked a powerful claim to be considered the definitive penciler of Earth’s Mightiest Heroes—no mean feat for a title launched by Jack Kirby and which counted John Buscema among its distinguished alumnae. As Tom Brevoort, Marvel’s executive editor, wrote in his introduction to the *Avengers Visionaries: George Pérez TPB*: “George was considered by many to be THE Avengers artist, and his first tenure on Earth’s Mightiest Heroes is looked back upon as a high-water mark for the series—one that few would equal.”

It definitely would be equaled, perhaps even surpassed, almost twenty years later, by an artist named...George Pérez. But that’s a story for another chapter.



“[The Korvac Saga] all happened because George Pérez wanted to draw a big epic story with a lot of characters. If you know anything about George, you know that he has always wanted to draw...well...everybody—the more characters, the better—and Big Jim [Shooter] was happy to oblige.” — **ROGER STERN**





GEORGE PEREZ



“What’s the secret of George’s appeal? If you ask me, it’s that George is a storyteller, first and foremost. Oh sure, he can dazzle you with his detail, and electrify you with his intricate action sequences, but that’s just the paint on the house. What gives George’s work its true power—and what so many of his imitators have failed to grasp—is that everything he does is in the service of the story. George’s characters live and breathe, they act.” — TOM BREVOORT



“Once I started getting the hang of the Beast, he became a bit of my personality in the book amongst all the heroes that I grew up reading. He was the cutup. I put my *joie de vivre* in Hank McCoy.”
— GEORGE PÉREZ

ONE SIDE OF THE
BEAST WAS WASHED
WITH A LEADING
SHAMPOO —

— THE OTHER WITH
ULTRA-X WITH NEW
IMPROVED
CONDITIONING
FACTORS.



WHICH WOULD YOU PREFER?

ULTRA-X

“I never would have imagined that the Taskmaster would have any major impact or lasting power. David Michelinie described him and mentioned the fact that he has an ability to imitate the abilities of other established Marvel heroes, so that gave me the visual impetus to give him bows and arrows and swords and, of course, a shield. Since he was supposed to be a character of mystery I came up with the idea of having his mask be a hooded skull.” — GEORGE PÉREZ



“I had a fun time with Jarvis. *Avengers* #201 featured a story at the back called ‘Bully.’ I don’t remember why David decided to dedicate eight pages of the book to Jarvis—but I was grateful.” — GEORGE PÉREZ



PÉREZ DREW THE AVENGERS FOR THE MARVEL COMICS CALENDARS IN 1980 AND 1981— FIRST, A CALLBACK TO A CLASSIC ADVENTURE THE TEAM SHARED WITH DOCTOR STRANGE, THEN ASSEMBLING THE WHOLE ROSTER FOR AN IMAGE THAT WAS REMASTERED IN 2019 AS A VARIANT COVER TO THE CELEBRATORY *MARVEL COMICS* #1000





PÉREZ ILLUSTRATED THE LANDMARK AVENGERS #200 IN 1980, AND LATER REVISITED THE CLASSIC LINEUP OF HIS ERA FOR THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE MASTER EDITION AND THE AVENGERS VISIONARIES: **GEORGE PÉREZ TPB**





CHAPTER FOUR

ONE THING AFTER ANOTHER

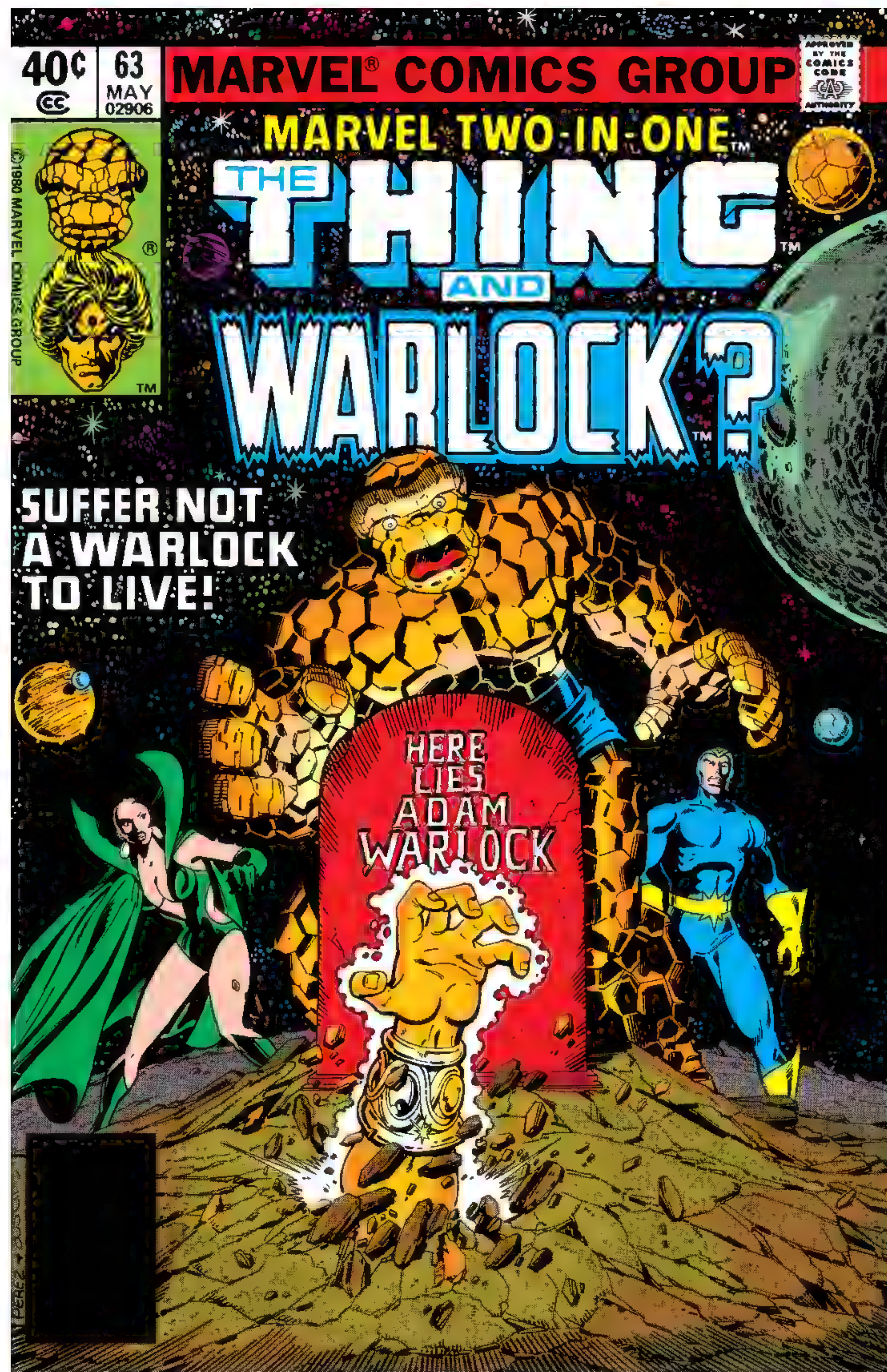
“I came to draw more characters.”



As the 1970s were drawing to a close, so too was Pérez's most prolific period at Marvel. But he still had a few itches to scratch—which brought him to *Marvel Two-In-One*, starring a character he particularly enjoyed: bashful Benjamin J. Grimm, the ever-lovin' blue-eyed Thing. It wasn't a team book, but it was the next best thing—a *team-up* book, featuring a different guest star each month. He began with a few covers, which, among other opportunities, allowed him to finally tackle Deathlok and, thanks to the magic of time travel, even pit the Thing against his original lumpy self.

But with #56, the book's co-writer, Pérez's good friend Ralph Macchio, asked him on board as penciler, to complete a story line begun by John Byrne. Featuring the artistic talents of these two titans of the field, it is no surprise that “The Project Pegasus Saga” became the series' most memorable arc—and, indeed, one of the most fondly recalled Marvel tales of the era.

Perhaps unsurprisingly with Pérez's involvement, at this point *Marvel Two-In-One* really did start to function as something of a team book, with a regular cast of fairly obscure characters keeping Ben company—Thundra, Quasar, Bill “Giant-Man” Foster, and Wundarr the Aquarian.



“The whole thing with *Marvel Two-In-One*, with the Thing being teamed up with characters that sometimes made no sense, was you have to create a story around the gimmick,” Pérez says. “Sometimes it worked better than others. Project Pegasus was an attempt to have it both ways, by having a running story arc where characters come in and out and they all gather up at the end.”

Pérez stuck around the title long enough not only to reacquaint himself with the Impossible Man, but to introduce a new iteration of super villain group the Serpent Squad, in “The Serpent Crown Affair.” And, just as the Thing proved himself one of Marvel’s most sociable heroes month-after-month, the gregarious artist enjoyed a great relationship with Macchio and his fellow writer Mark Gruenwald. “They were both sweet guys,” Pérez says. “Ralph was one of my first supporters. He just enjoyed being in the playpen there, working together and becoming big friends with Mark. They were just old-fashioned fanboys who just happened to be working in comics.”

During these early years of his career, Pérez grabbed any and every opportunity to draw yet more characters on covers for other series, showing fans his interpretations of Spider-Man, Ghost Rider, the Defenders, and others—though he declines to claim sole credit for his cover work back in those days.

“One of the things at Marvel in that era was that most of the covers were designed by art directors—either by John Romita, Dave Cockrum, or Marie Severin,” he explains.

“There were certain strengths you needed to be the cover artist, who sells the book visually at first glance—that sense of power. So I was following somebody else’s design, but you can give the same cover design to three different artists and you will get three different versions, each playing to different strengths. Trying to keep that Marvel style and inject my own personality was a welcome challenge. Eventually, I would start developing an understanding and knowledge of how to make that work and later, at DC, I really started designing my own covers. But without those gentlemen and lady I mentioned, I don’t know if I would have become as dynamic a cover artist as quickly.”

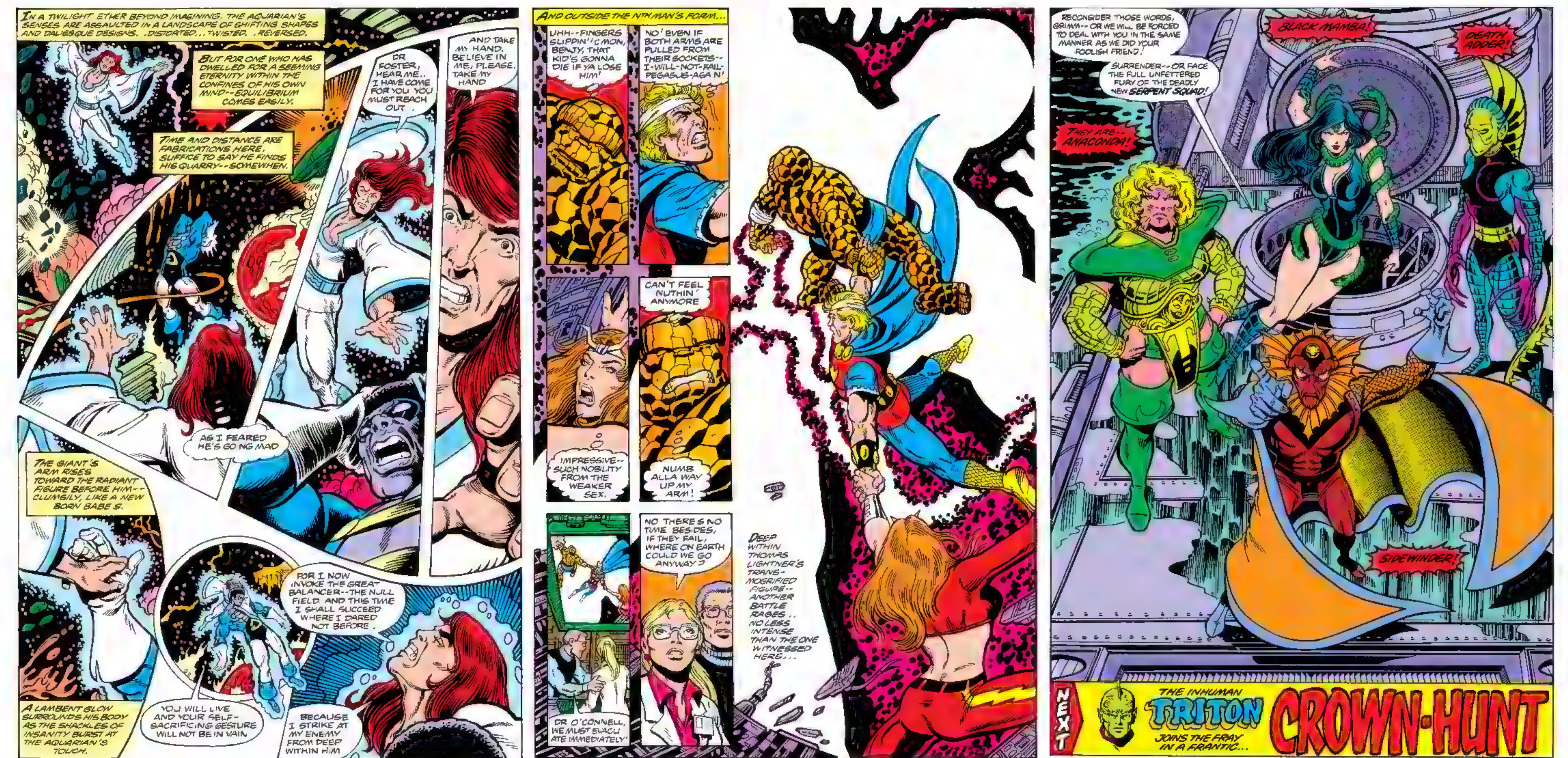


In addition, Pérez dipped his toe into the waters of the X-Men, during the period in which Chris Claremont and Byrne were propelling Marvel’s mutants to the top of the sales charts. He drew a pair of covers for the regular series, interiors for *X-Men Annual* #3, and a black-and-white short story featuring the original X-Man Iceman—just enough to leave fans wanting more, including one notable example.

“Chris Claremont wishes I had done more X-Men with him,” Pérez says. “He tells me every time he sees me. For me, that Annual was one of the great joys, because it was the only time that I managed to do a book that was fully inked by Terry Austin. I lobbied to try and get Terry on *Avengers* but he went to work with John Byrne on *X-Men* and the rest is history, as they say. The Annual was a lot of fun. I really, really put a lot of extra work on that book—and even had the honor that John Byrne himself inked one of the pages.”

There’s that combination again. During the 1970s, Pérez and Byrne had risen alongside each other to the pinnacle of the profession, each driven on by the other—as well as by their fellow contemporaries who, as a new decade dawned, were taking the comic book industry to the next level.

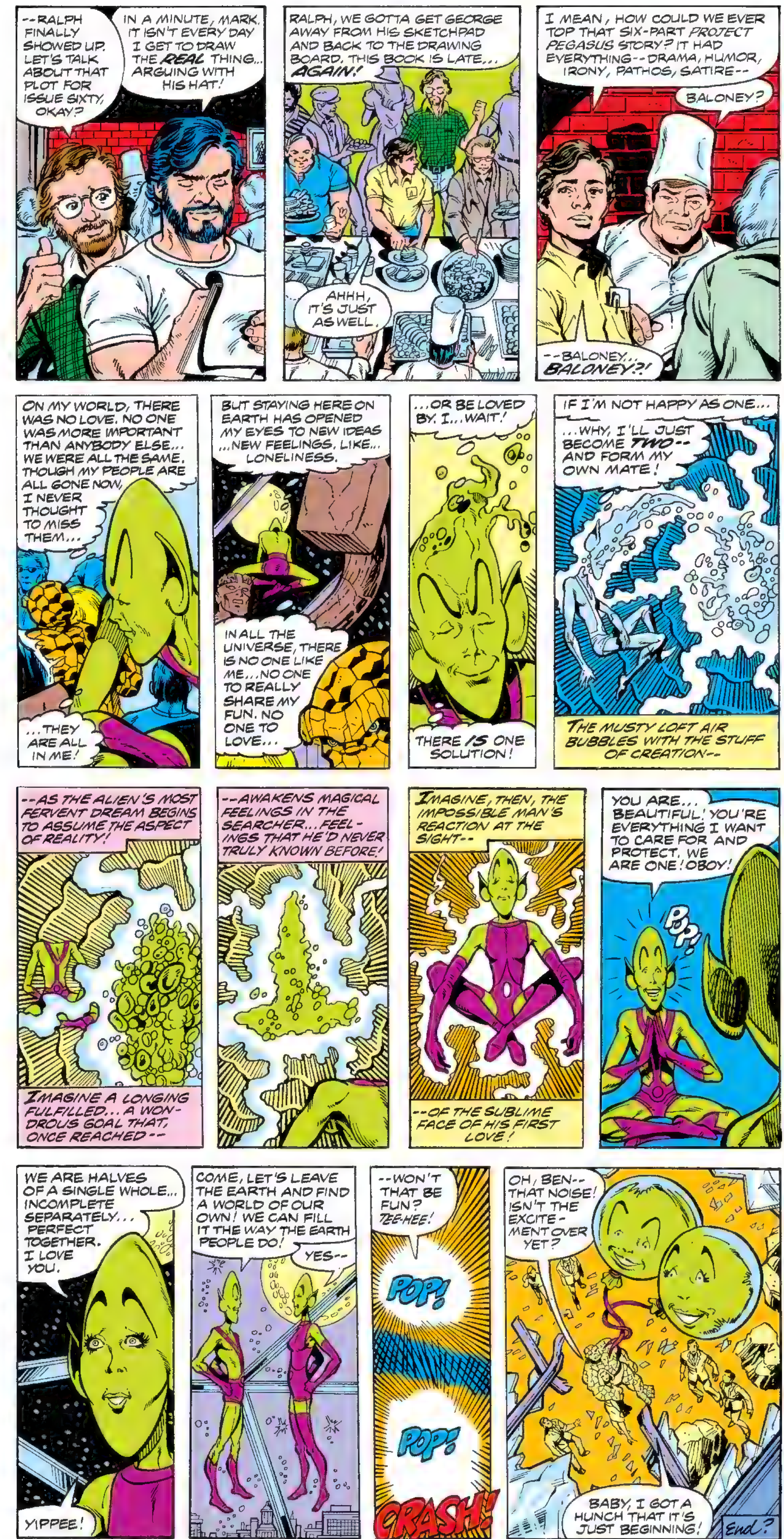
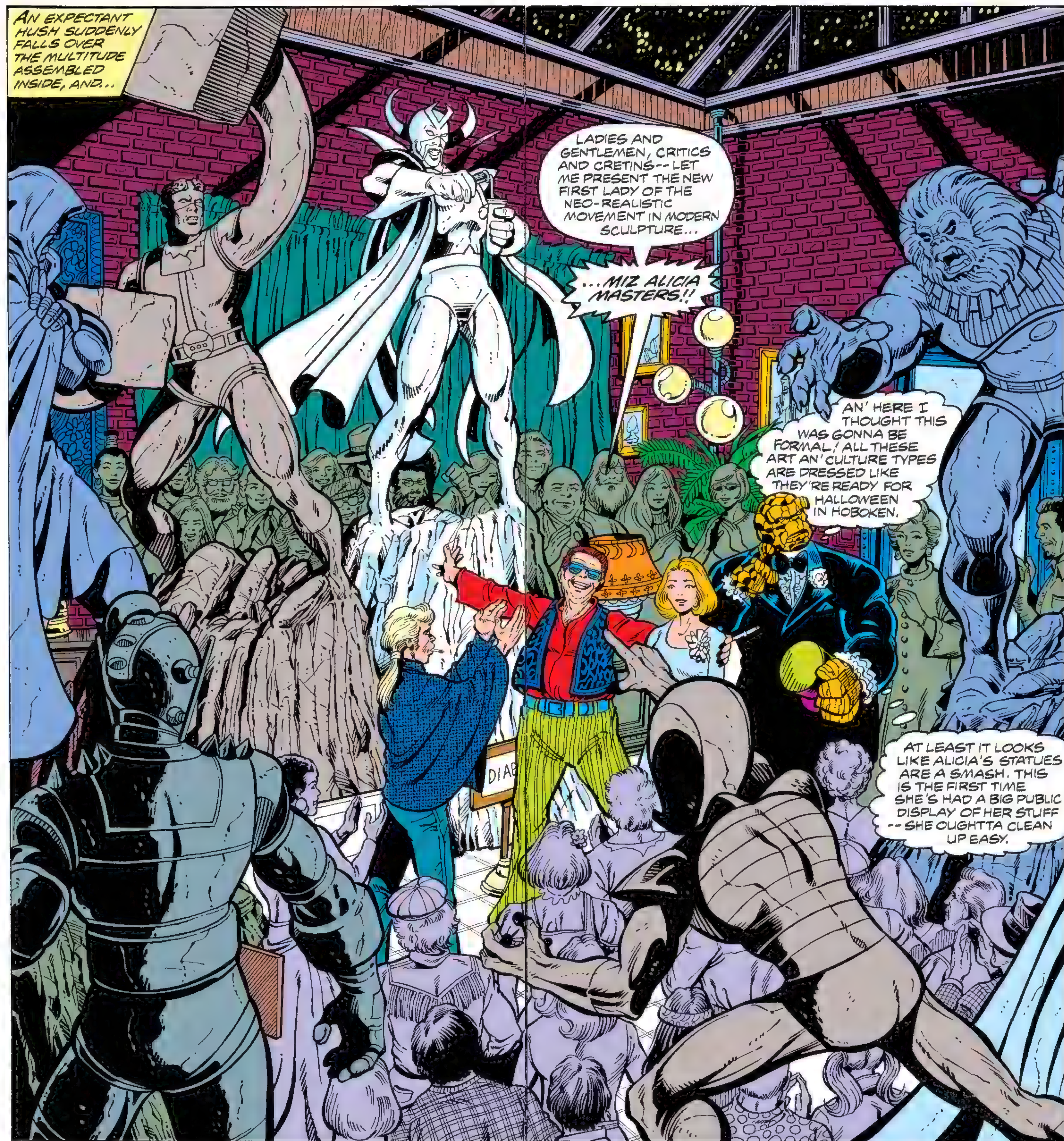
“I’d seen John Byrne’s work when it first started appearing in Marvel Comics,” Pérez says. “It was really slick. He was one of the first inkers I ever had, on Gullivar Jones, Warrior of Mars. I got to see some of John’s pencils when I worked in the office, and my



work was rough compared to his, which made me wish I was that slick. But John said, ‘I wish I could rough up my work the way George does.’ John’s been a fan of mine, just as I have been a fan of his. It spurs you on. You start picking up little things that seem so easy for other artists that you want to be as easy for you. I didn’t want to be John, I didn’t want to be Jim Starlin, but I was inspired by them to do certain things. Dave Cockrum was already established, but I loved his work. Dave showed what you could do as someone who is creative and talented and enthusiastic. An artist whose detail I loved, but had a style totally uniquely his own was Bernie Wrightson—he was jaw-dropping. Philippe Druillet, who did a lot of stuff in the *Heavy Metal* vein, he was so ornate, good gosh. It drove me crazy. Oh, and seeing Frank Miller’s early pages when he started to do *Daredevil*. In fact, he asked my advice on a cover one time... It was a magnetic time.”

But, for Pérez at least, the times they were a-changing. His destiny lay at DC Comics. Still, there would be one last Marvel project...one more character.

“When I was young, it seemed to me as if George Pérez were everywhere. Pick up a copy of *Fantastic Four*, and there he’d be. *Avengers*, same deal. *Inhumans*. *Marvel Two-In-One*. ‘Sons of the Tiger.’ ‘Man-Wolf.’ At his peak, George was handling somewhere in the neighborhood of four regular assignments. This was obviously a guy who loved what he did. I loved what he did, too.” — TOM BREVOORT



"Every time I draw the Impossible Man I always seem to be in the story, because I made a cameo with Mark Gruenwald and Ralph Macchio." — GEORGE PÉREZ





No. 19 FALL 1977

F.O.O.M.

SPECIAL DEFENDERS ISSUE

PÉREZ'S COLORFUL COVER FOR #19 OF THE
MAGAZINE F.O.O.M. UNITED THE DYNAMIC DEFENDERS
AND MANY OF THEIR FRIENDS AND FOES



THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN FACED AN ARMY OF DEADLY ENEMIES IN PÉREZ'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE 1978 MARVEL COMICS CALENDAR

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MARVEL TEAM-UP
FEATURING

SPIDER-MAN®

AND

CAPTAIN BRITAIN™

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TM

AT LAST!
MARVEL'S
BRITISH
SUPER-HERO
SENSATION
EXPLODES
ON THE
STATESIDE
SCENE--

--AND
GUESS
WHO IS
CAUGHT
IN THE
BLAST?

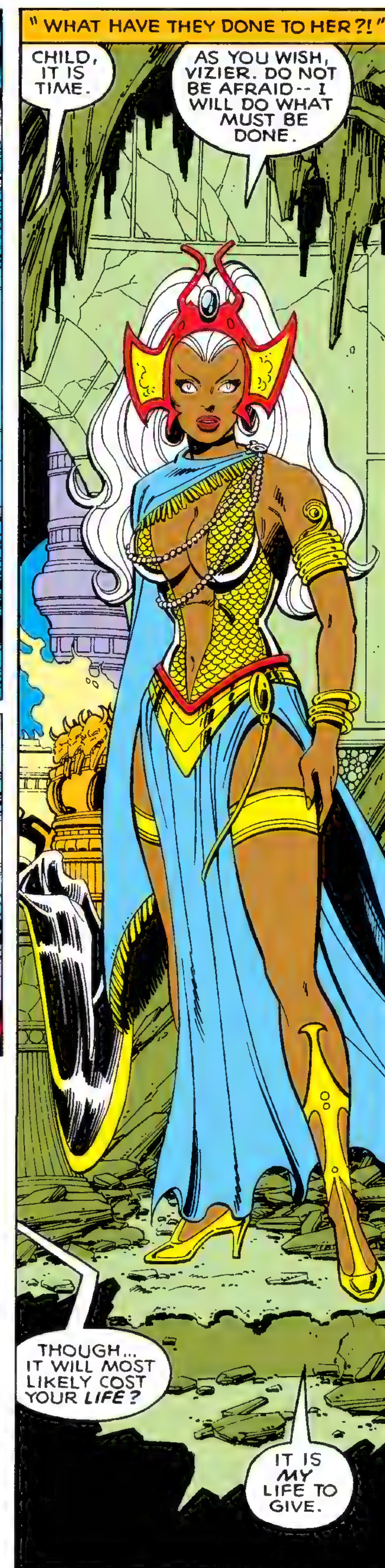
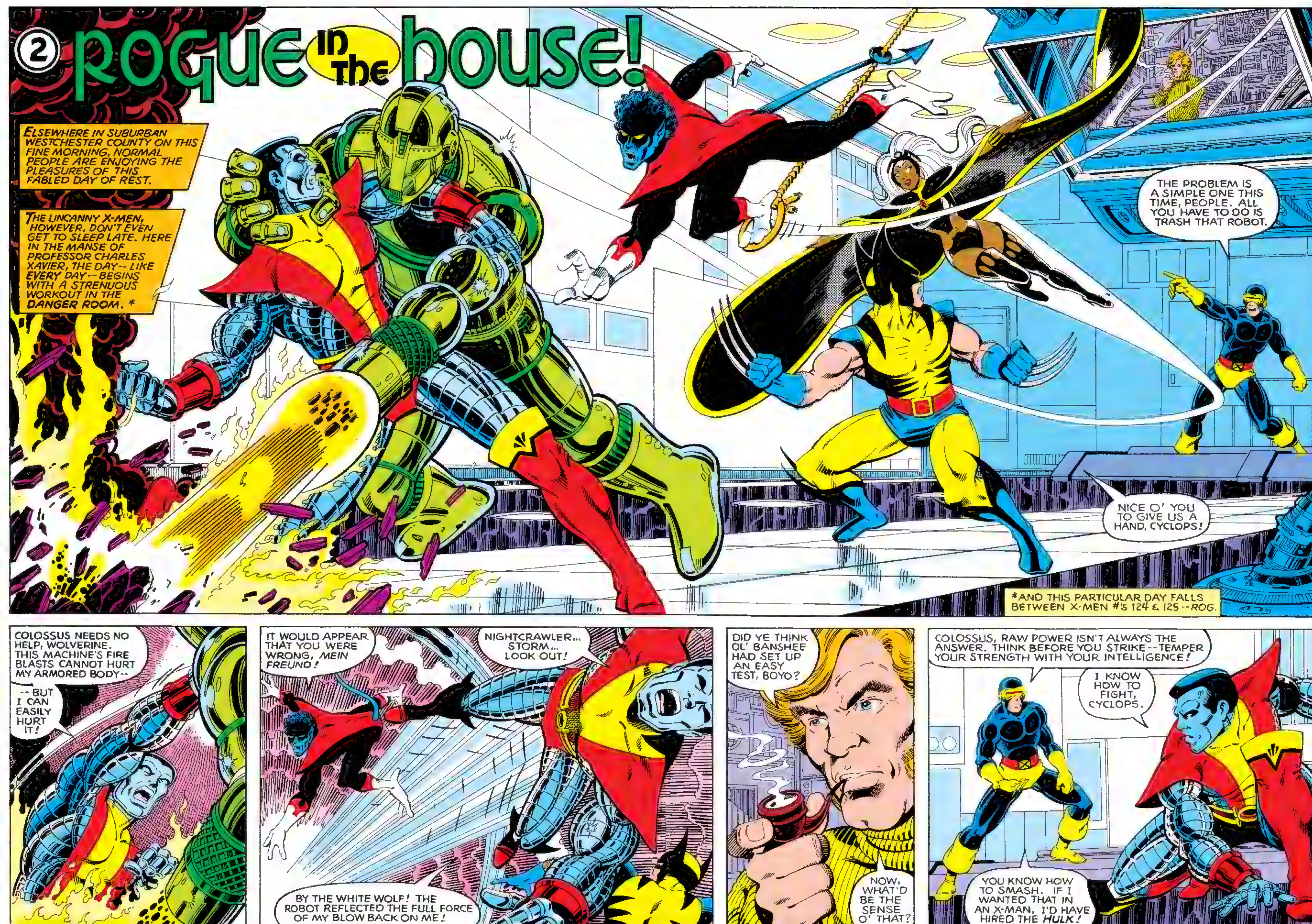
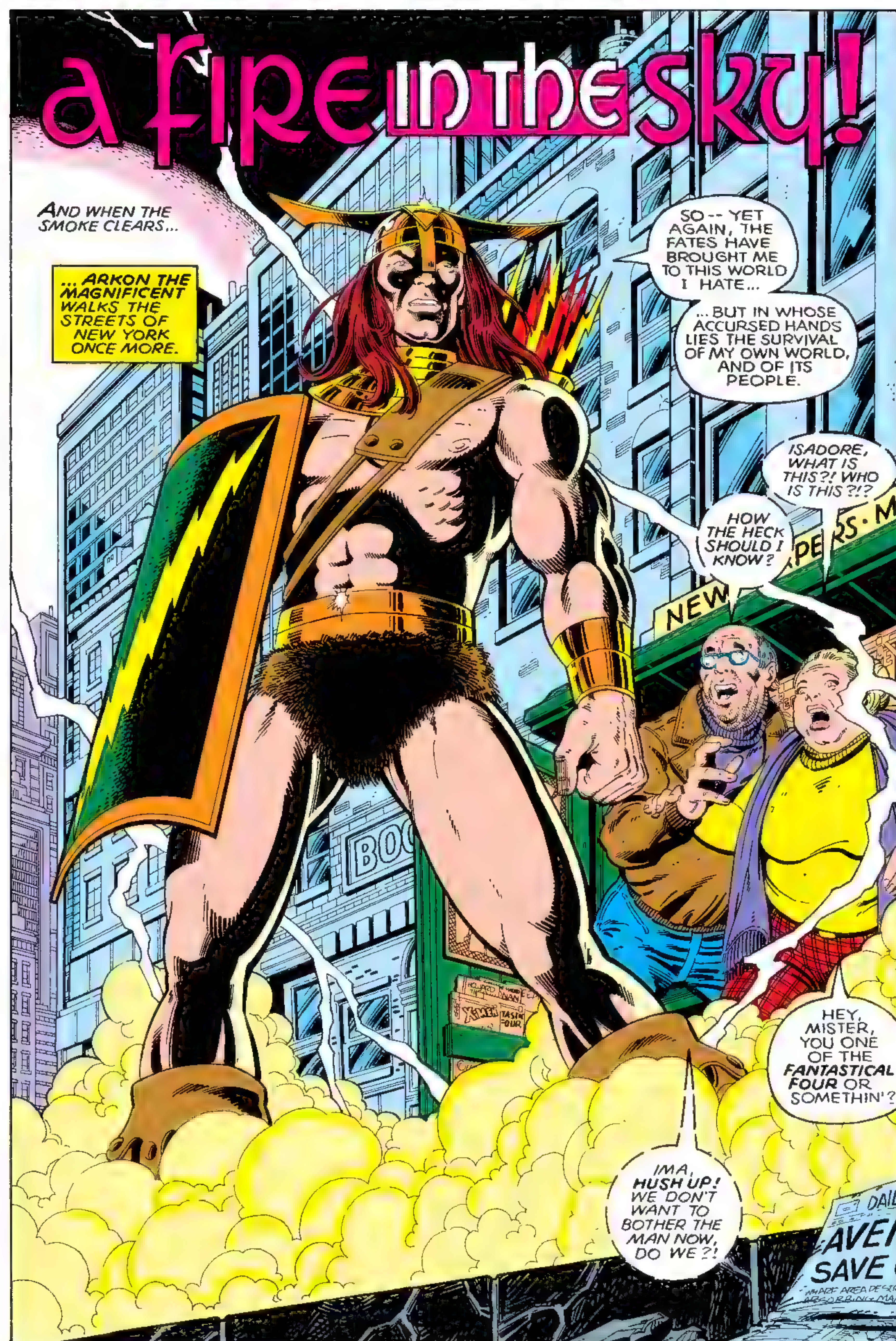


TITANS CLASHED IN THE 1979 MARVEL COMICS
CALENDAR, AS PÉREZ PITTED THE SILVER
SURFER AGAINST THE HULK



“On my first X-Men cover [*X-Men* #112], I drew some hair on Wolverine’s arms—and according to John Byrne that was the first time it was allowed. Then John took it a lot further—since I got away with it, that opened up the door.”

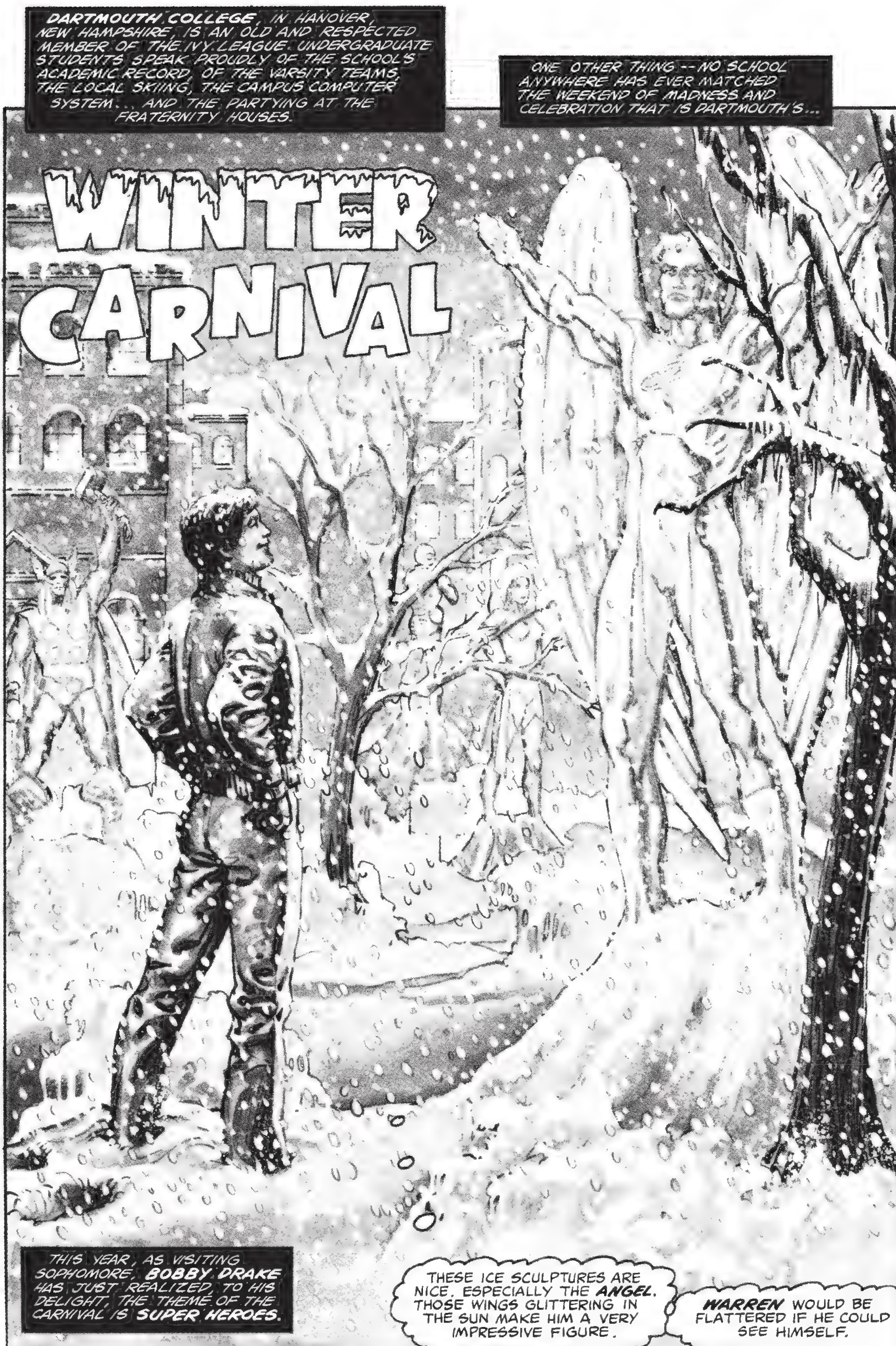
— GEORGE PÉREZ



“I vividly remember George coming up to me in the hallway at Marvel, saying that he had been offered the job of penciling the first-ever *X-Men Annual* containing all-new material, but would only do it if I would ink it. I eagerly agreed to our own personal ‘Marvel Team-Up.’ Naturally, inking George’s pencils can be a bit of a challenge thanks to his refusal to scrimp on the detail, but as someone who has successfully teamed with similarly inclined talents such as Arthur Adams and Brian Bolland, I know that this artistic verisimilitude contributes to what makes their styles unique—and part of the joy of inking is being adaptable to the stylistic quirks of each penciler, hopefully resulting in a ‘happy marriage’ of our diverse talents. I can honestly say that my union with good ol’ George was always a joyous one—and I hope it was on his part as well!” — **TERRY AUSTIN**

“I am incredibly greedy. It’s not enough to work with the best of the best—I want to work more with the best of the best. What I would have loved to have tried with George is doing an X-Men story that was a comedy. George is one of those ridiculously gifted talents of whom you could ask anything and he would give it to you, in many cases better than you asked. Marv and others were far luckier than I, but at least I got one—and that one was a lot of fun.”

— **CHRIS CLAREMONT**



"I got to work with my first female writer in Jo Duffy on that Iceman story. That was just a lot of fun, but it was a challenge because of the ice and snow, which has always interested me ever since reading 'The Frost Giant's Daughter,' drawn by Barry Windsor-Smith back in *Conan*. That idea of using white as a color." — **GEORGE PÉREZ**



CHAPTER FIVE

WEB OF INTRIGUE

“I have always had an affinity for strong women.”

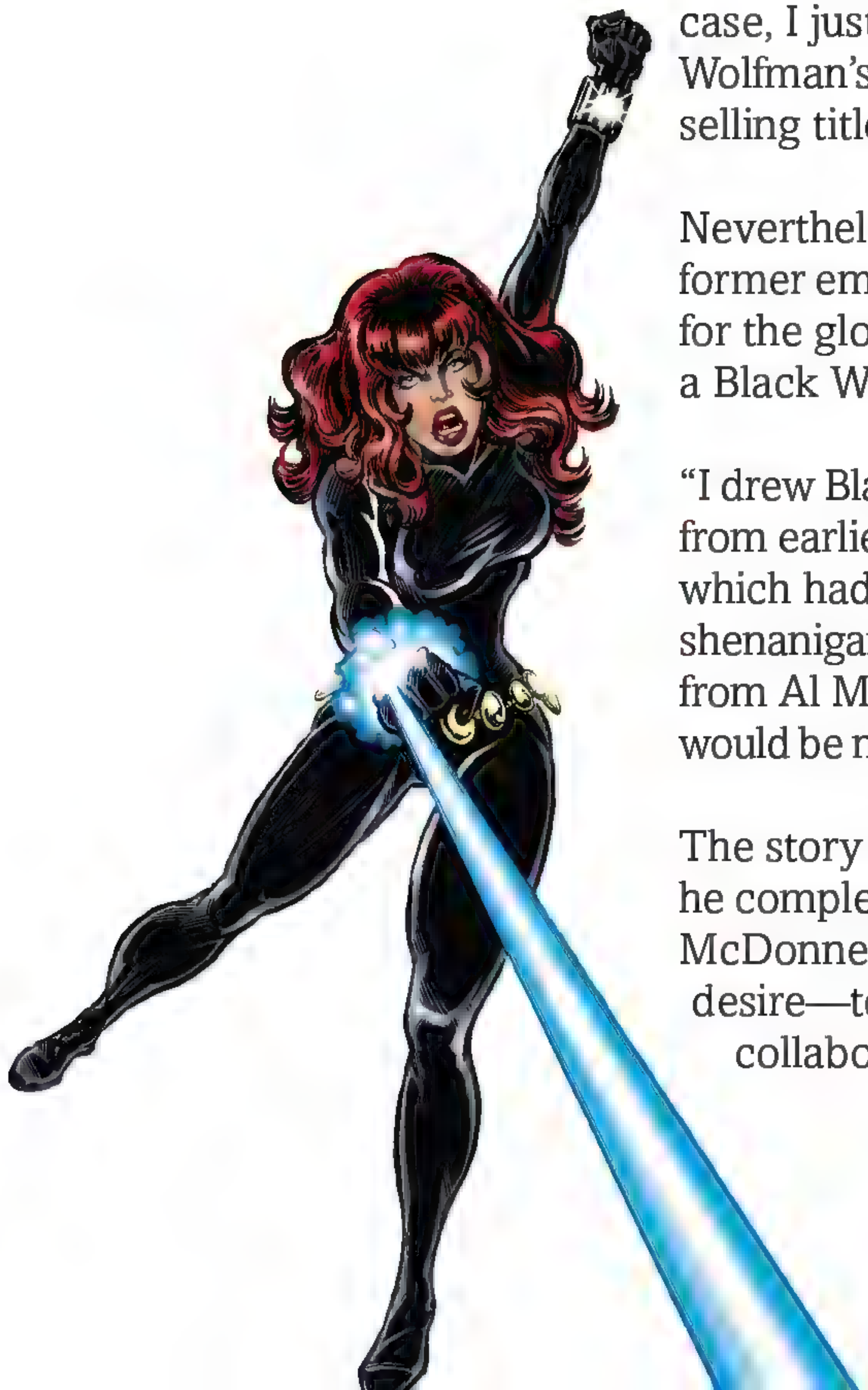
This aspect of Pérez’s persona later made him the ideal choice to reshape the world of *Wonder Woman*, and inspired the star of his sadly short-lived creator-owned title, *Crimson Plague*. But the first female character whose solo adventures he illustrated—and indeed plotted—was Marvel’s femme fatale, the Black Widow.

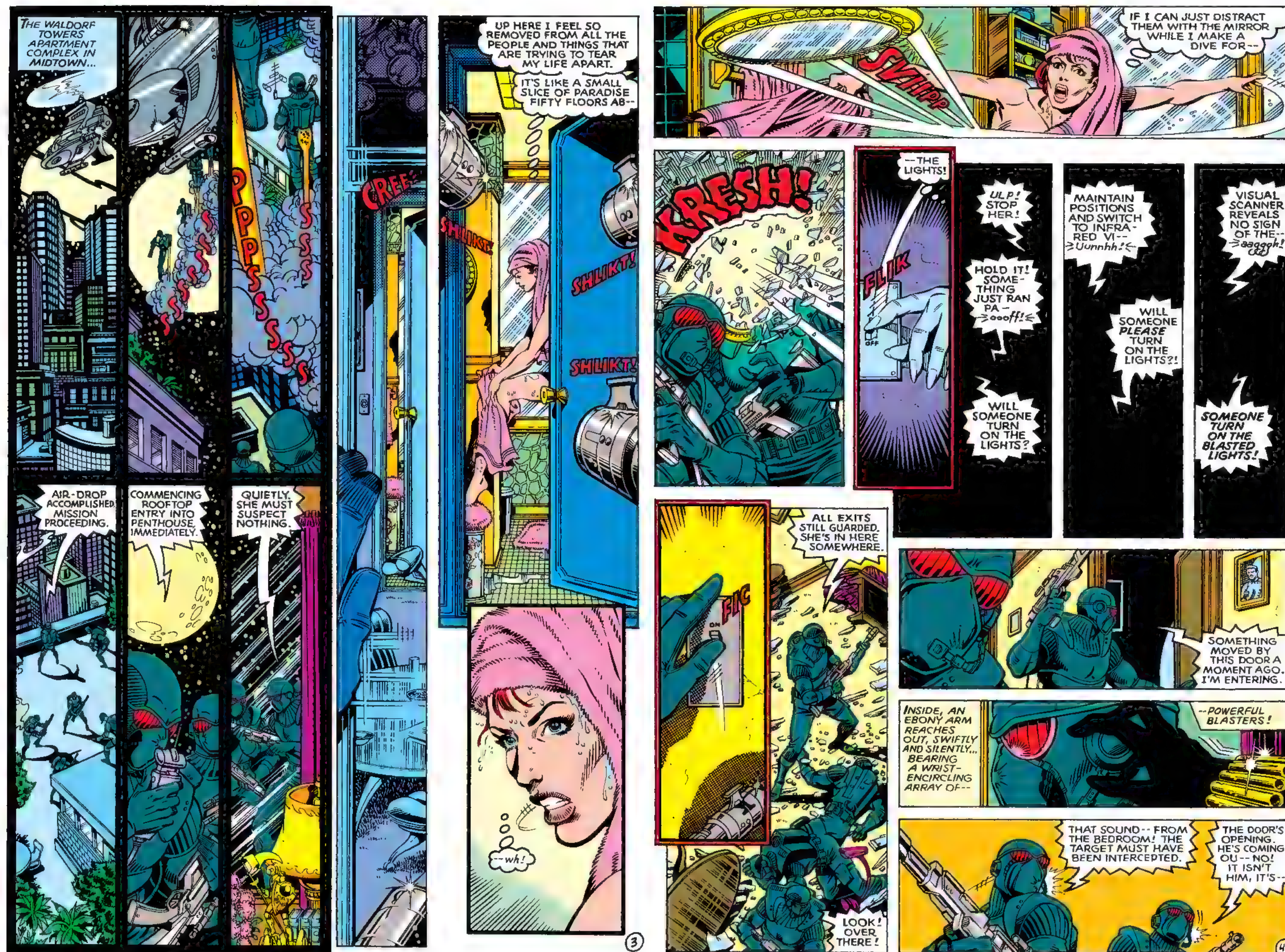
It was 1983, by which point Pérez was firmly established at DC, where he had completed a run on *Justice League of America* and joined his old friend Marv Wolfman in revamping the publisher’s classic teen hero group as the *New Teen Titans*. For a time, Pérez had tried to work at both companies, but when work pressures led him to concentrate on just one book, he chose *Titans*—the book that truly felt like his. “There were rumors that I was disenchanted with Marvel at that point,” he recalls, “but that was not the case, I just didn’t have the time.” Pérez was hugely rewarded for the decision. His and Wolfman’s modern reinvention of a second-tier DC property became one of the biggest selling titles of the era, and confirmed Pérez as a comic book superstar.

Nevertheless, there was one abandoned project Pérez had largely completed for his former employer that was gathering dust—and when editor Al Milgrom needed material for the glossy paper of the anthology series *Marvel Fanfare*, what could be better than a Black Widow story drawn by one of the industry’s biggest names?

“I drew Black Widow at the tail end of my time at Marvel, around 1979, but the story was from earlier than that,” Pérez says. “It was a James Bond/*Modesty Blaise* type story line, which had the Black Widow going back to Russia and getting involved with some spy shenanigans. For whatever reason I ended up stopping the project, and when I got word from Al Milgrom that they needed something to put into *Marvel Fanfare*, I thought that would be nice—but that meant using the pages I had before and drawing a new sequence.”

The story ran in *Marvel Fanfare* #10-13, with Pérez covers on the first three, but, while he completed some of the new material, his workload meant that Bob Layton and Luke McDonnell had to step in to draw one fresh chapter. Similarly, Pérez had no time—or desire—to fully script the tale he had plotted, which offered the opportunity for another collaboration with Ralph Macchio.

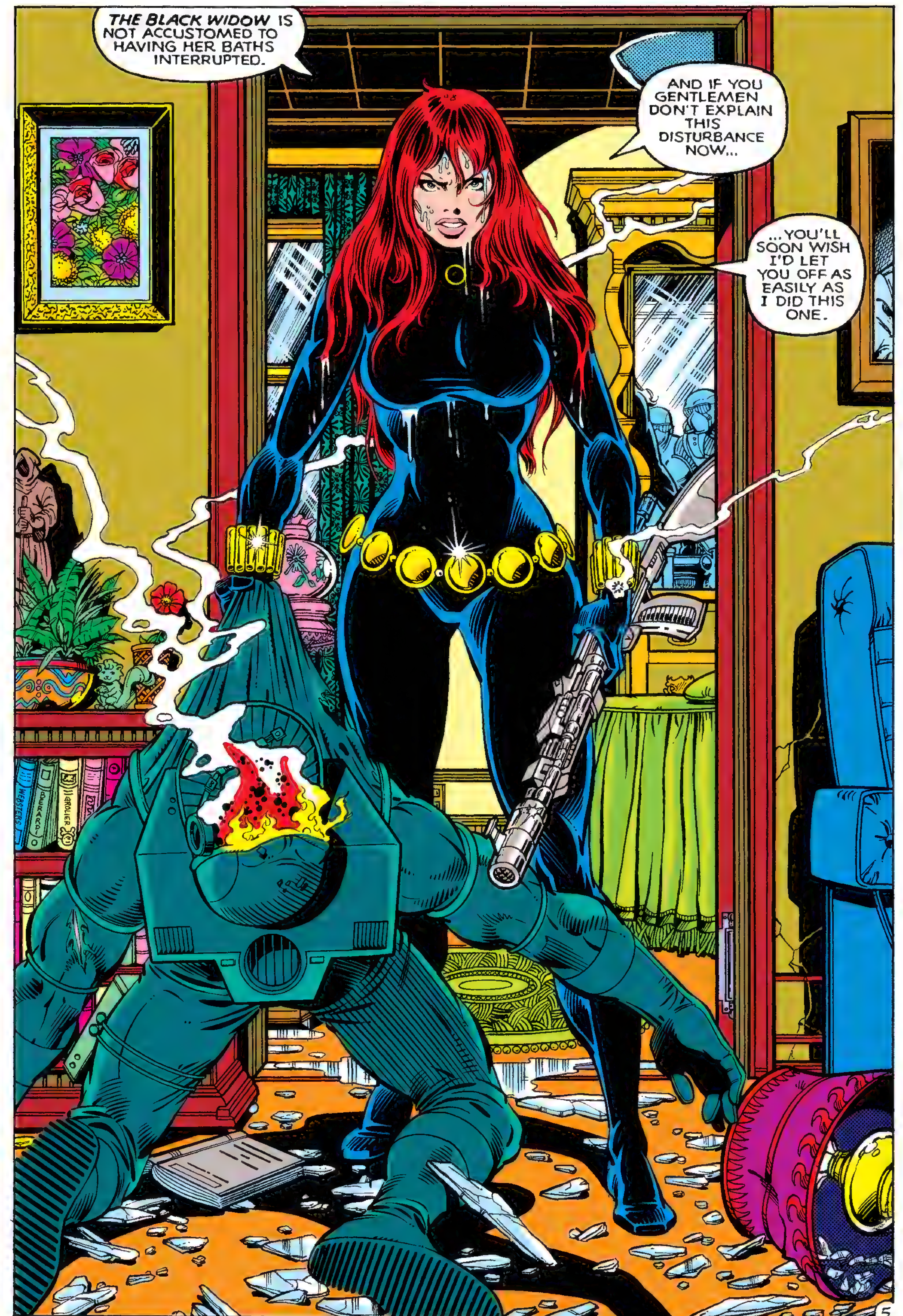




Macchio, who took huge pleasure in having been there from the beginning and watched his friend's career "skyrocket," was delighted to take over scripting duties. "The heart of the story was more than an espionage story," Macchio says, "it was whether Natasha Romanoff would be able to hunt down and take out her former chauffeur Ivan Petrovich, who was really a father figure to her. We wanted to see whether or not, as a cold-blooded spy, she would be able to kill him. We wanted to show many facets of her personality. When we opened that first issue, we show that she can be absolutely ruthless. She's taking her bath and she is attacked by S.H.I.E.L.D. They invade her penthouse and she is willing to kill them, because Natasha is a spy, not a super hero. If she has to kill, she will kill. But we also wanted to emphasize it wasn't simply that ruthlessness that made her who she was—there was also a sensitive side to her. George's portrayal of Natasha and her cloak-and-dagger existence made it a true delight to script. Although the artwork was of such a high caliber I was loath to put word balloons over any of it!"

Pérez is proud of producing such an enduring Black Widow story at a time when there weren't many such comic book tales featuring female characters—because, he believes, most comic book writers "didn't really know how to write a female character."

"I think Chris Claremont was the first to really show that he had the knack for female characters," Pérez says. "So it was nice to be able to do a memorable story with Black Widow. She is a strong, assertive character who started as a villain, with this great history as a Russian agent who went over to the other side. People who know me,





know about my fetish about female combat, but I also like the way a woman can really assert herself. I was inspired by Diana Rigg's Emma Peel, by the comic strip original of *Modesty Blaise*, and the concept of Wonder Woman, if not the execution by that point of Wonder Woman. My life has been defined by the women in it, starting with my mother, and I have been blessed with knowing a lot of strong women. The old cliché is being in touch with your feminine side, but that is something I never had trouble connecting to. One of the best compliments I have received when I have done books with female leads—with the acknowledgment that, yes, I do tend to put women in spandex and sexy costumes, but then again, the men are in form-fitting costumes as well—is the fact that sometimes people are surprised those stories were written by a man. That is a high compliment, because I have gotten into the mind of the character.”

Four decades on, Natasha Romanoff has become a household name thanks to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, yet Pérez and Macchio's story—which has been collected under the name “Web of Intrigue”—remains one of the character's defining comic book adventures, featuring some of the most iconic Black Widow images ever drawn.



THE WEB TIGHTENS!

THE BLACK WIDOW HAS BEEN CAPTURED IN HONG KONG WHILE ON A MISSION FOR SHIELD, THE GLOBE-GIRDLING ESPIONAGE ORGANIZATION HEADED BY COLONEL NICK FURY. SHE STRUGGLES HELPLESSLY AGAINST HER BONDS, SURROUNDED BY HER CAPTORS--

-- AS THE GUNSIGHT OF A HIGH-POWERED RIFLE FOCUSES MENACINGLY ON HER EXQUISITE FACE.

SUDDENLY...



"There was one sequence I did, where the Black Widow was tied to a chair with these costumed assassins ready to torture her, and she whips the tar out of all of them still tied to the chair. I don't know if it was deliberate, but I would like to think it was a nice little homage, that they had Scarlett Johansson do the same thing in the first *Avengers* movie. That was a scene I was proud of and it gave me a real *déjà vu* when I saw it." — **GEORGE PÉREZ**



CHAPTER SIX

THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET

“I wanted to draw as many Marvel characters as I could.”

That’s what enticed Pérez back to draw 1991’s cosmic epic, *Infinity Gauntlet*—the chance to draw the Avengers, Fantastic Four, X-Men, Spider-Man, the Hulk and many more, all in a single book, after so long away.

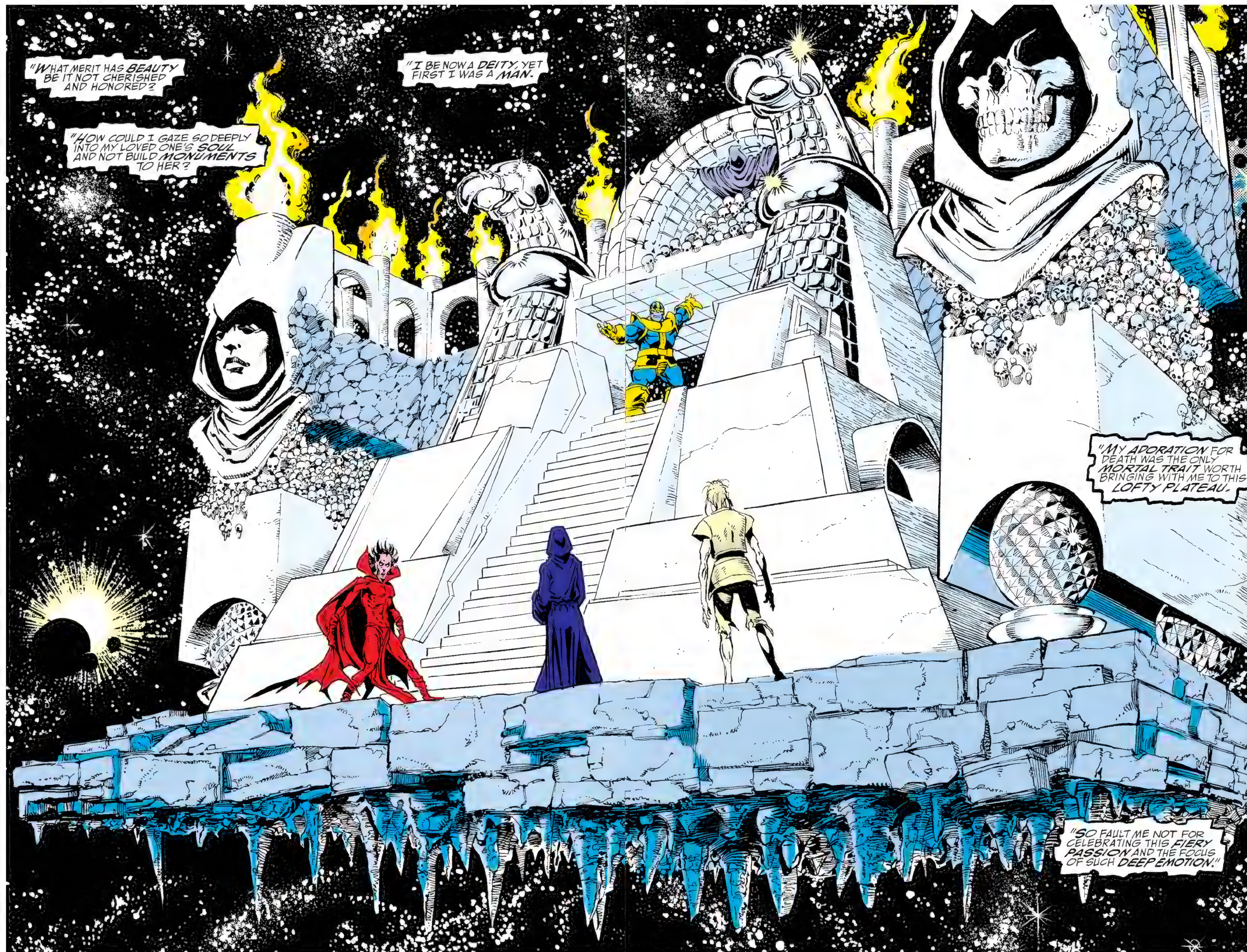


In the 1970s, he may have made his Marvel, but the 1980s he devoted to DC, following his acclaimed *New Teen Titans* run with the industry-changing *Crisis on Infinite Earths*—a limited series that introduced a new continuity for the DC Universe, and which Pérez says “became the touchstone on which all crossovers were based.” He enjoyed further success as writer and artist of *Wonder Woman*. However, as his tendency to overcommit

reared its head again, he admits to having a hard time being able to produce the kind of work he was happy with in the timeframe that made a monthly book viable. Projects including a Teen Titans graphic novel faltered, and editorial frustrations dampened his enthusiasm for his major *Wonder Woman* event book, *War of the Gods*. So, as a new decade arrived, Pérez’s career entered a new phase. And the 1990s would prove momentous not only for him, but for the entire comic book industry. The speculator boom sent sales soaring, fueled by the popularity of a new generation of artists including Jim Lee, Rob Liefeld, and Todd McFarlane. But while there may never have been a better time to be a penciler, Pérez was left feeling “disenchanted.”

“I was beginning to feel story content was not being considered as important as marketing,” he says. “The idea of people not opening a comic book, but slabbing it to keep it in pristine condition, defeats the entire purpose. A comic book is not a baseball card, it is supposed to be read. I felt, why are we drawing in these books, we may as well print blank pages. And books that are being sold because of a collector’s mentality, with multiple variant covers, and other gimmicks, were not as conducive to good content.”

Lee, Liefeld, McFarlane, and others shook the industry by leaving the big two publishers behind to found Image Comics, a revolutionary move that opened up the way for creators to own their creations, and unlock seemingly limitless earning potential by doing so. However, Pérez believes this “superstar system” was a “mixed blessing” because writers and artists “were starting to outshine the creation”...himself included.



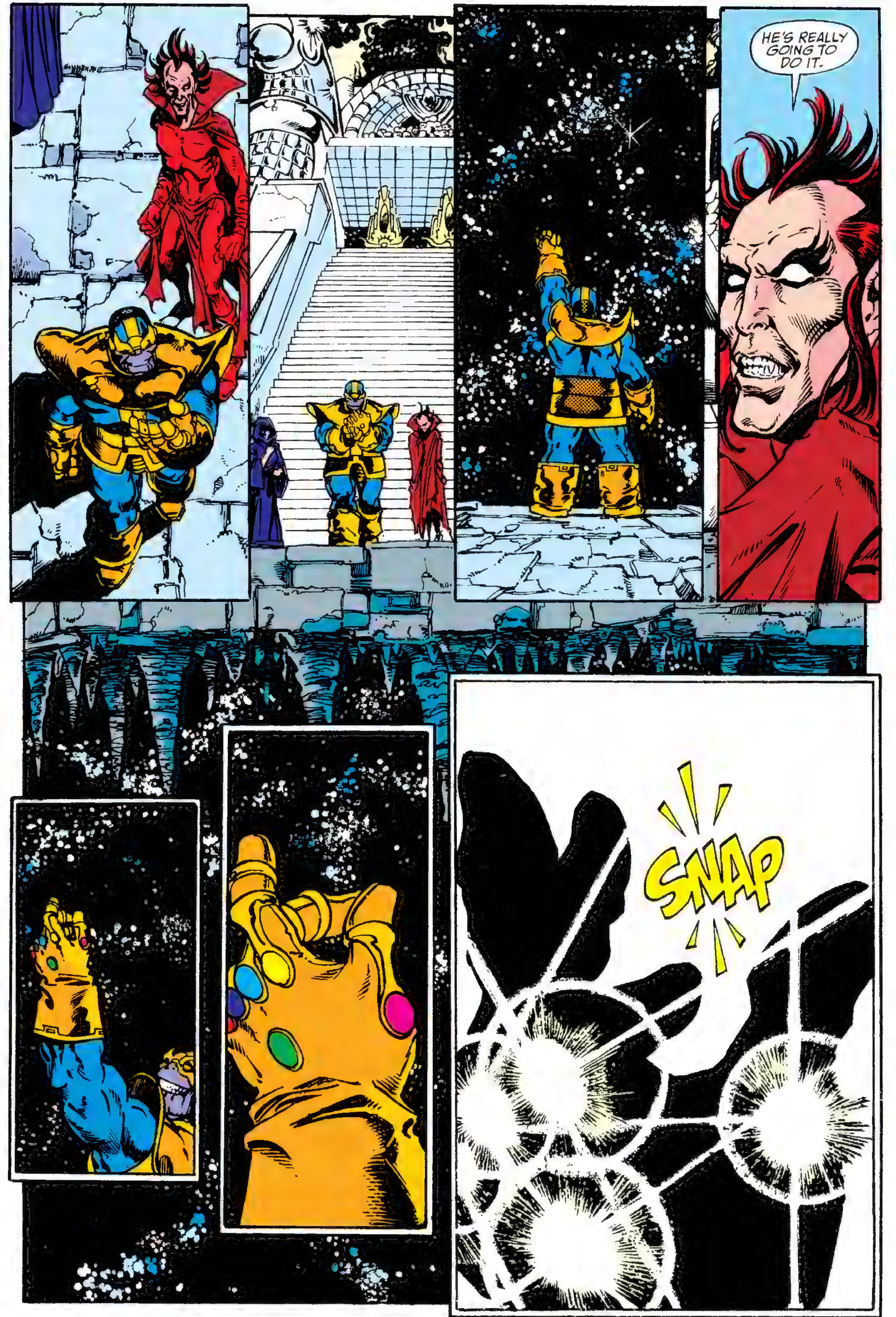
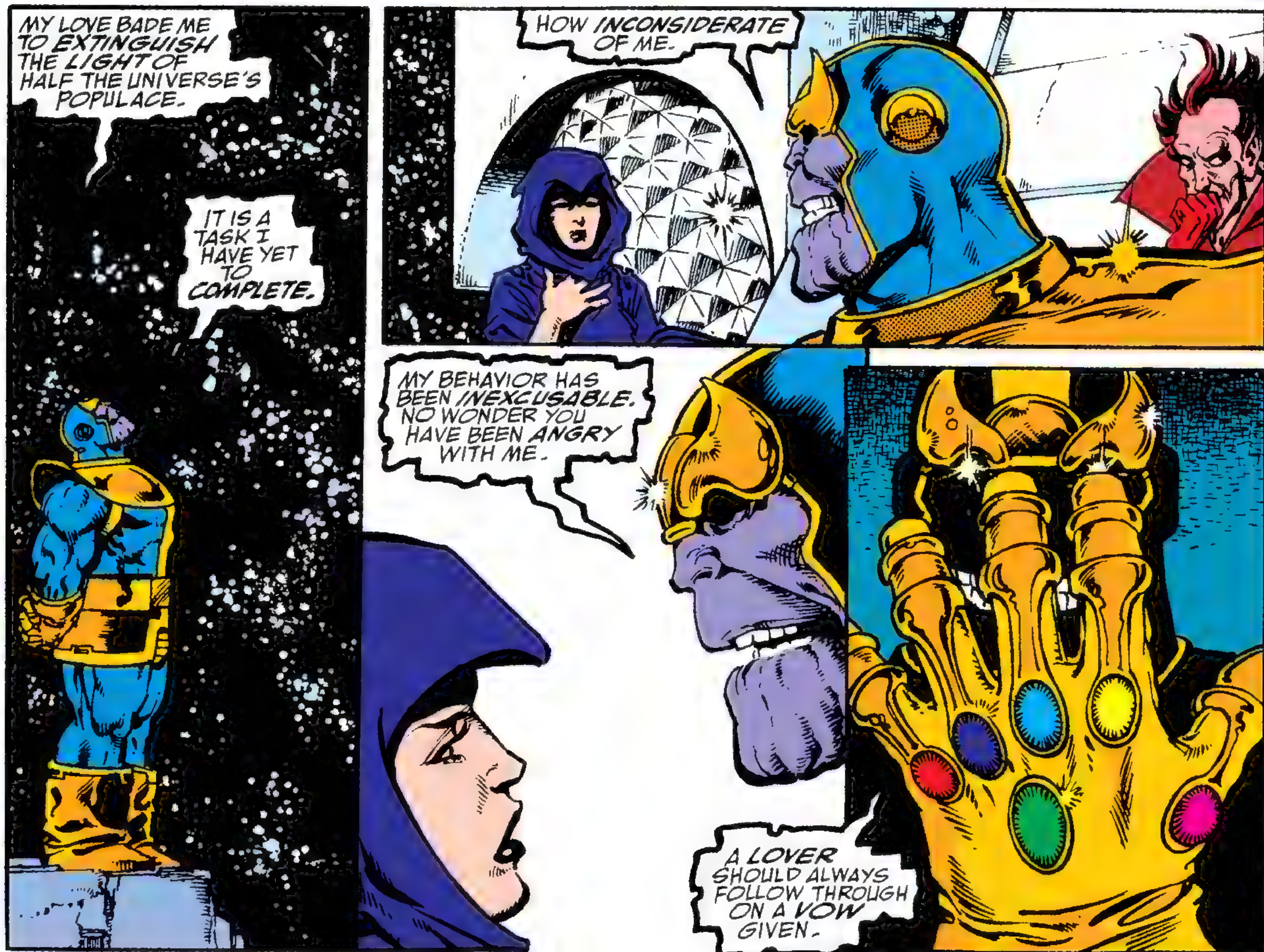
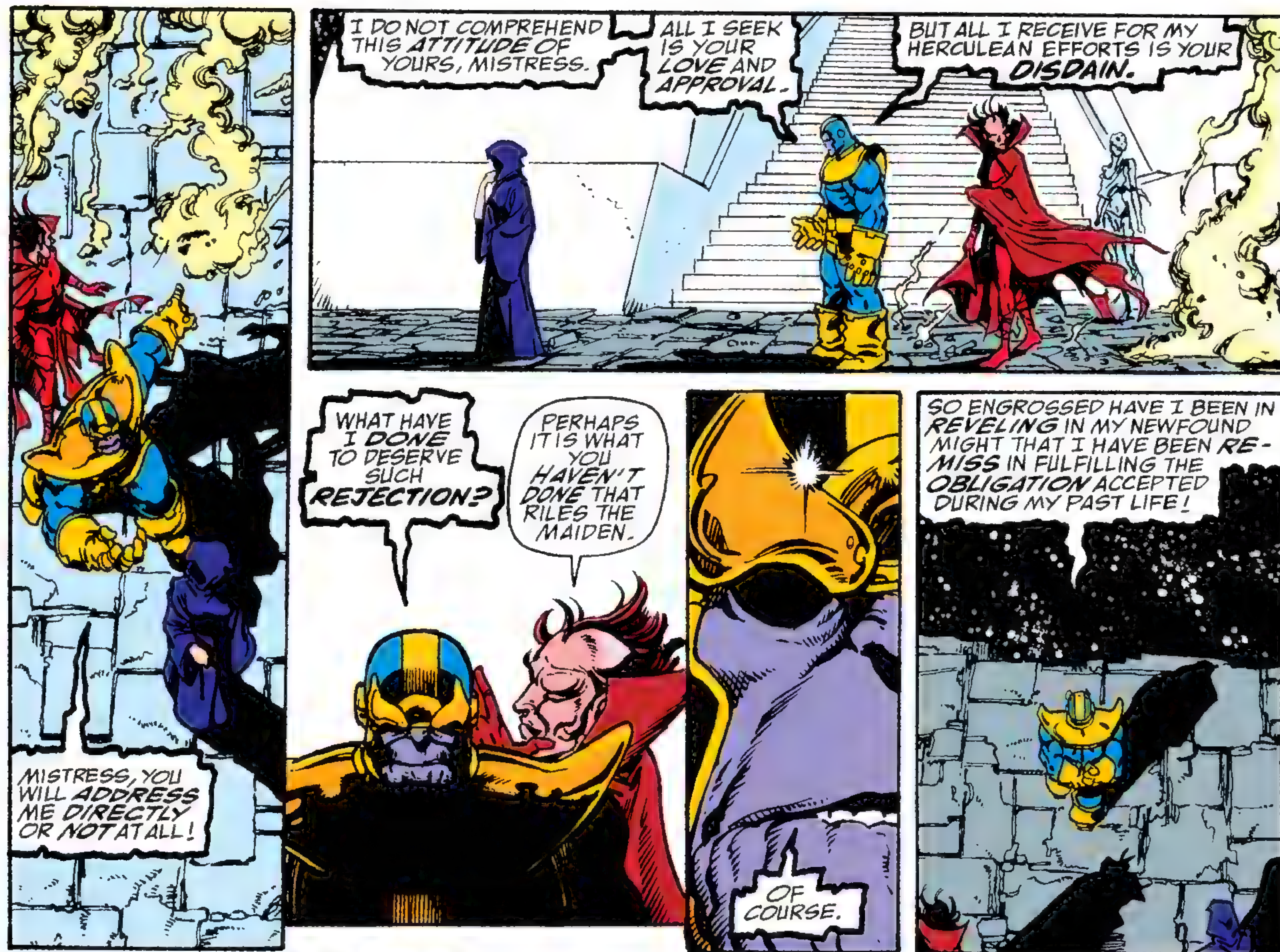
"Designing that big temple floating for Death that Thanos created, I knocked myself out doing all this detail—and then I realized I would have to draw it again and again..."

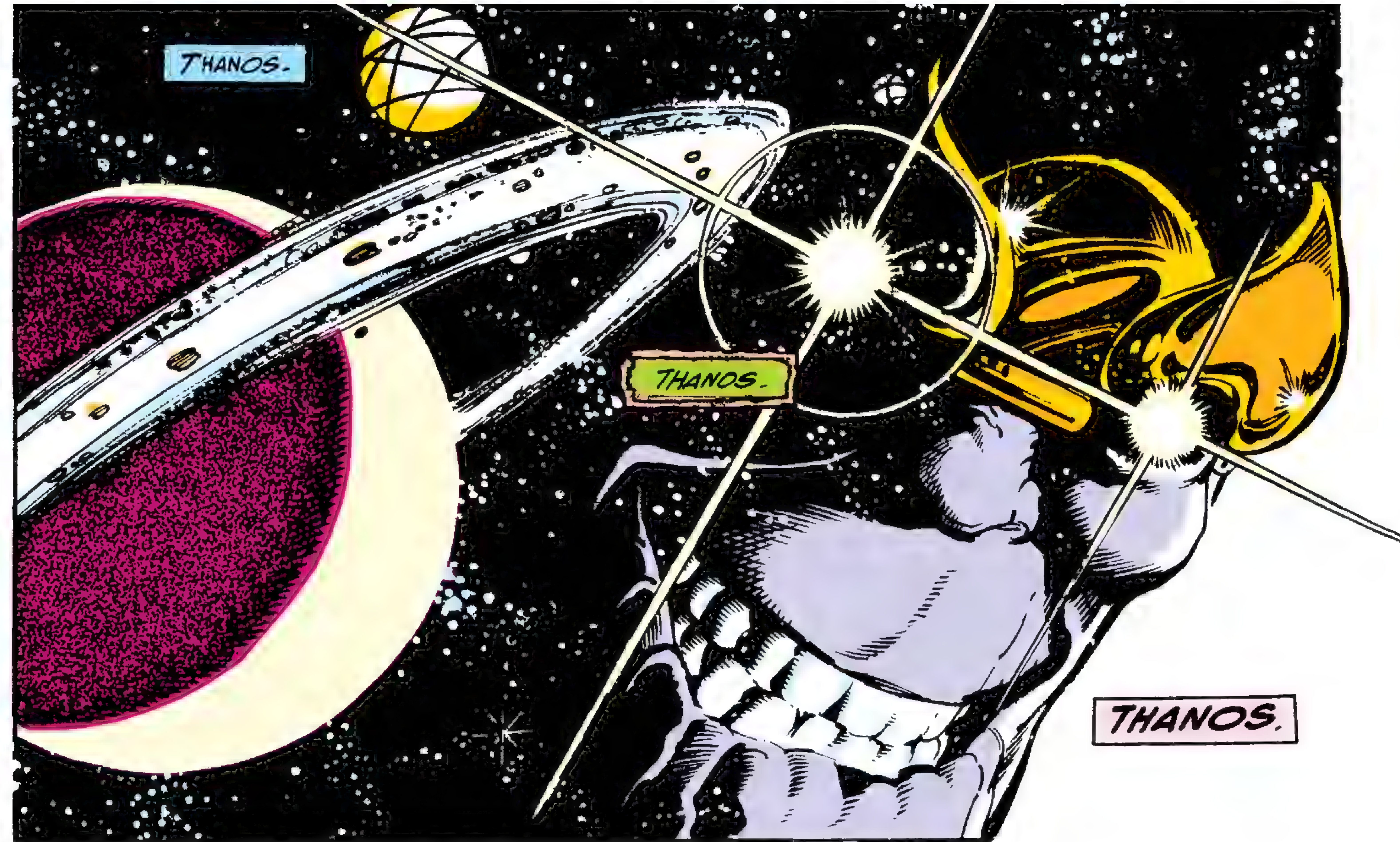
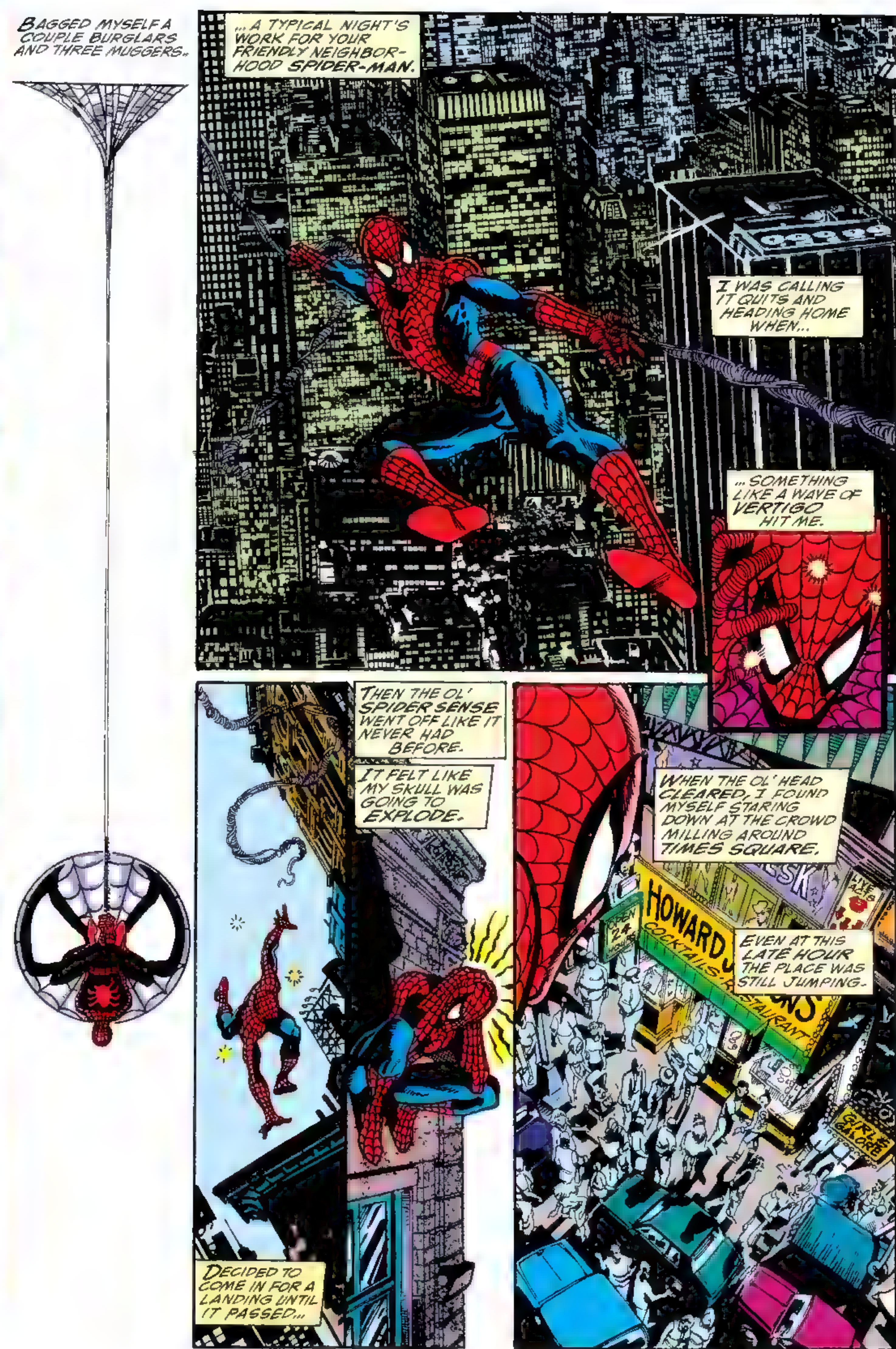
— GEORGE PÉREZ

"It didn't matter what I drew as long as my name was on it," he says. "That, I thought, was dangerous, because then you are selling your reputation, but you are not producing something to earn that reputation anymore. I realized that I had no need to improve. If I could draw less than my best work and still sell it, I would become complacent or stagnant. It took away from my development."

And so the opportunity to do something fresh, with all the Marvel characters he loved, was a welcome one—not least because the writer was Jim Starlin, a visionary creator whose artwork Pérez so admired. "Jim Starlin was one of the last artists who really inspired me, with his *Warlock* and *Captain Marvel*," Pérez says. "I was absolutely astounded at the cosmic nature of his layouts and style. He was putting all these tiny panels in too. He was the last conscious influence that I had."

As a writer, Pérez describes Starlin's scripts as "very full," with a detailed, panel-by-panel structure, adding: "My challenge then was to take Jim's descriptions and use them as a springboard. Many times, he would have scenes that required three panels, which I would break up into the Pérez style—suddenly, those three become six. Or I emphasized different parts of the same scene. One of the things that Jim did is he would have the characters talking for multiple panels, and he told you, just copy the illustration from panel-to-panel. But unless it is a building, nobody stays super still, so I said, no, if a character is talking, that character is going to be drawn from different angles in every panel. That is the way I work. *Infinity Gauntlet* was fun, but it was a lot of work—which, mostly, as usual, I put on myself. They probably would have been content even if I did half the amount of work as long it looked decent and they got it in on time. But no. Typical me. I can't draw Spider-Man over a building without drawing every building underneath him!"





Pérez returned to Marvel after a full decade's worth of artistic development at DC, clearly evident in the way his style had evolved. "In part due to drawing teenage characters on *New Teen Titans*, I developed a more subtle style of human figures, without losing the dynamics," he says. "I went back to one of my earliest influences, Curt Swan—the Norman Rockwell to Jack Kirby's Salvador Dalí. I started to find myself able to incorporate both influences and, more and more, I developed a greater sense of individual physiques. When I left Marvel, I was still gestating. By the time I came back, I was fully grown. My bag of tricks was a little fuller. The George Pérez style was fully defined."

He unleashed all his skills in the breathtaking opening chapter of *Infinity Gauntlet*, where Starlin's signature creation, Thanos, has united the six Infinity Gems into the titular glove, giving him mastery of time, space, soul, mind, power, and reality. In his relentless desire to prove his love for his mistress Death, the Mad Titan snaps his fingers—and wipes out half of all life across the Marvel Universe. It's a stunning moment, brilliantly rendered.

"I played director to Jim's screenwriter in that case," Pérez says proudly. "Jim described it and it took a couple of panels but I said, no, I really, really wanted to build up the tension. I took Jim's already tense scene and made it more intense. The snap had to be large, and not only large but visually distinctive, so I came up with the idea of drawing the 'shadow hand' using an eraser to create the light effect. I marveled at how Joe Rubinstein managed to interpret that into ink. He made it sing and it became a defining moment."

The iconic sequence has, of course, gone on to enjoy greater significance more than two decades on, after it inspired the key events at the heart of blockbuster movies *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*. "I joked, when I saw *Infinity War*, wow, it took them two and a half hours to do what we managed to do in only about twelve or fifteen pages," Pérez laughs.

Similarly timeless is Pérez's cover for *Infinity Gauntlet #1*—itself a composition worthy of a film poster. "The impact that *Infinity Gauntlet* had was far more expansive than I ever imagined," he says. "That cover I did for #1 has become so iconic. The stroke of inspiration was using the Infinity Gauntlet by having these beams of light coming out of it like a glinting star, basically creating multiple panels within the image. I just wanted to do something where I could draw a lot of characters and still not take away from the emphasis that this was Thanos' series. Now I have seen homages to it all over the place. I like drawing covers that are interesting and my strength is my own sense of design and the fact that I like filling the eye."

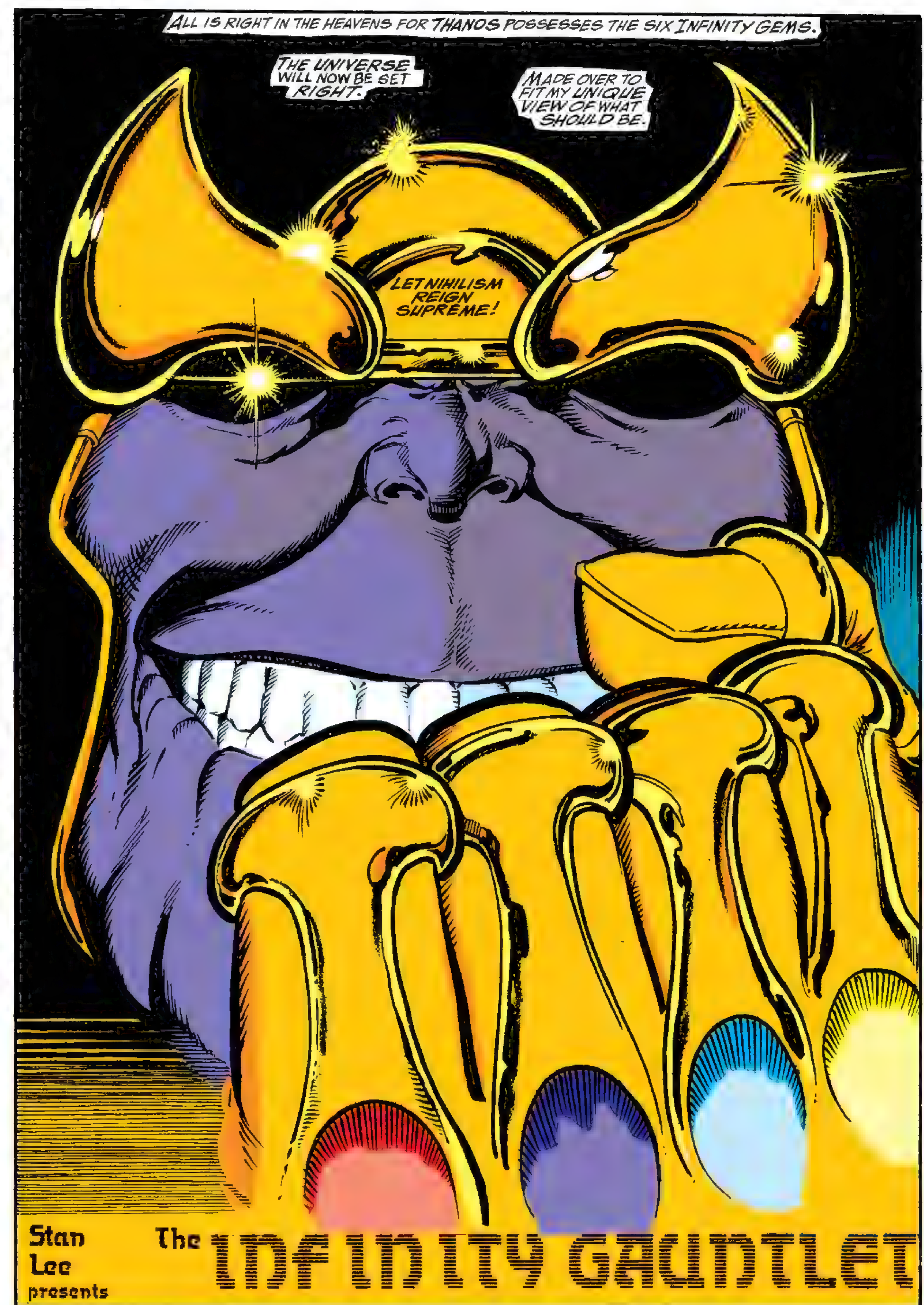
On covers and interior pages, Pérez grabbed his chance to draw as many heroes as possible, but admits to disappointment that the downside of Thanos' genocidal finger snap was that it ruled out adding even more. Meanwhile, not for the first time in his career, the timing of *Infinity Gauntlet* was unfortunate, clashing as it did with his DC commitments to *War of the Gods*, for which he was writing and providing layouts.

"I overextended myself," Perez admits. "I was contractually bound to finish *War of the Gods*, and something had to give."

That meant that he had to make the difficult decision to leave *Infinity Gauntlet* half-completed, only a few pages into #4. Ron Lim, who had collaborated with Starlin on

"I always admired George's sense of design and storytelling. I was blown away by his art on *Infinity Gauntlet* and terribly disappointed when he left the book."

— JIM STARLIN



“I have become so synonymous with the character, but this was the only time I drew Thanos professionally. At conventions, Thanos is one of the most requested characters I get for sketches.”
— GEORGE PÉREZ

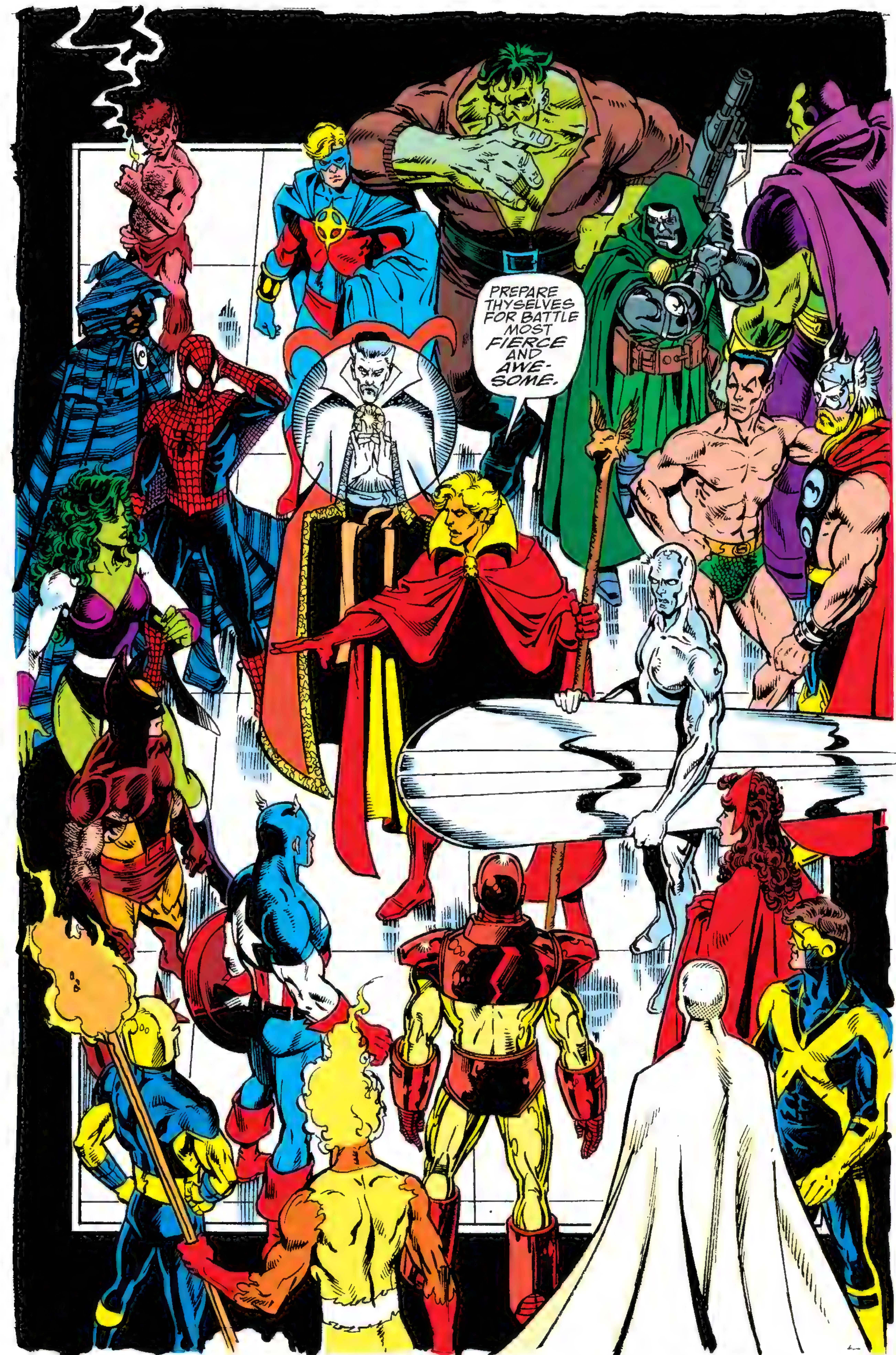
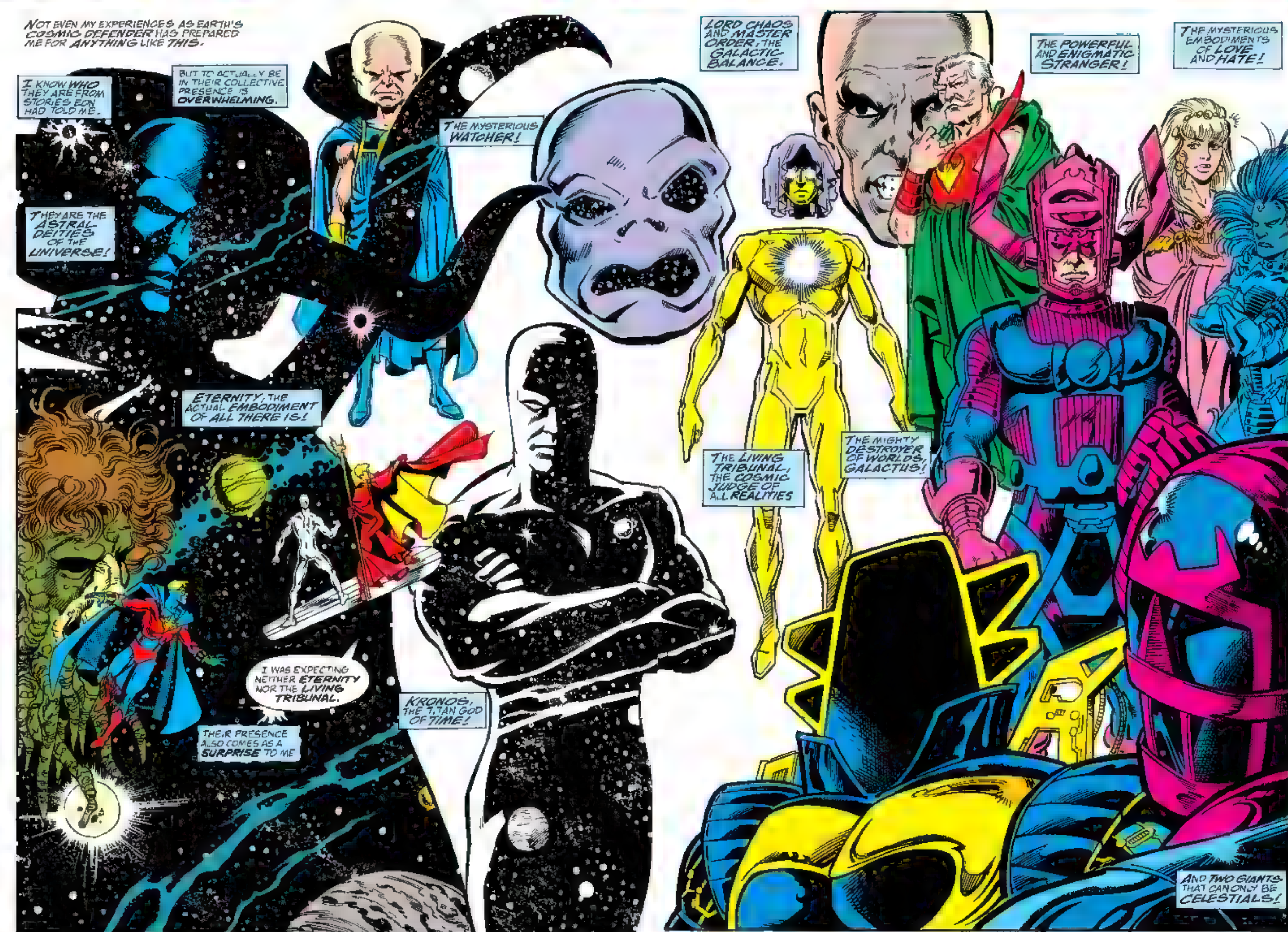
the precursor *Thanos Quest* and a lengthy run on *Silver Surfer*, took over for the rest of the six-issue series. For Pérez, being unable to finish *Infinity Gauntlet* remains one of his biggest regrets.

“Jim and I had found our rhythm,” he says, “and I really, really wanted to do justice to what he was putting down. It would have been nice to finish it, but Ron Lim did a fine job on a book that I thought should have been his to begin with. I inked Ron’s covers [for #5 and #6] as a bit of continuity—and just so people didn’t think I just left in a huff.”

So Pérez was back, if not quite yet here to stay. But the 1990s were young...









CHAPTER SEVEN

MEET THE MAESTRO

“Future Imperfect was just one of those happy accidents.”

After leaving *Infinity Gauntlet*, and the difficulties he experienced with *War of the Gods* at DC, Pérez felt he was developing a reputation for being unable to complete projects—and that he had to prevent it taking hold. “I just needed to do something that was a little more finite,” he says, “not quite so grand.” What he found in 1992 certainly delivered on the first front—a two-issue series, albeit each one comprising 48 pages. Far from some universal crossover, this story focused on just one iconic Marvel character, who he had particularly enjoyed penciling in *Infinity Gauntlet*—the Hulk. It was the ideal combination: the strongest hero there is drawn by the strongest storyteller there is, working in tandem with legendary *Incredible Hulk* scribe Peter David. Suitably inspired, Pérez took this finite project, *Incredible Hulk: Future Imperfect*, and did what he does best—he made it grand.



But it would never have happened if not for his wife. Pérez married Carol Flynn during the height of his success on *New Teen Titans*, and it was rare for her to involve herself in his creative life. But she had read one of David’s *Star Trek* novels and enjoyed it, so suggested that, if her husband ever get a chance to work with the writer, he should take it.

“I had met Peter, so I got in touch and said, if you ever want to work on something together, I would love that, because my wife is a fan,” Pérez says. “As it turned out, *Future Imperfect* was a script waiting for an artist. In less than a couple of hours, if that, I got a call from editor Bobbie Chase, basically offering me the book. Peter had called her immediately saying George Pérez wants to work with me, and Bobbie said, ‘George Pérez, really?’”

David and Pérez made a genuinely incredible combination for *Future Imperfect*, a prestige format two-parter that is one of the most celebrated stories in the writer’s acclaimed, twelve-year association with the Hulk. The tale features Bruce Banner transported to Dystopia, a nightmarish vision of tomorrow where Earth’s heroes are gone and a vicious tyrant named the Maestro rules with a gamma-powered fist. The Hulk joins the rebellion only to ultimately realize that the ruthless Maestro is in fact his future self.



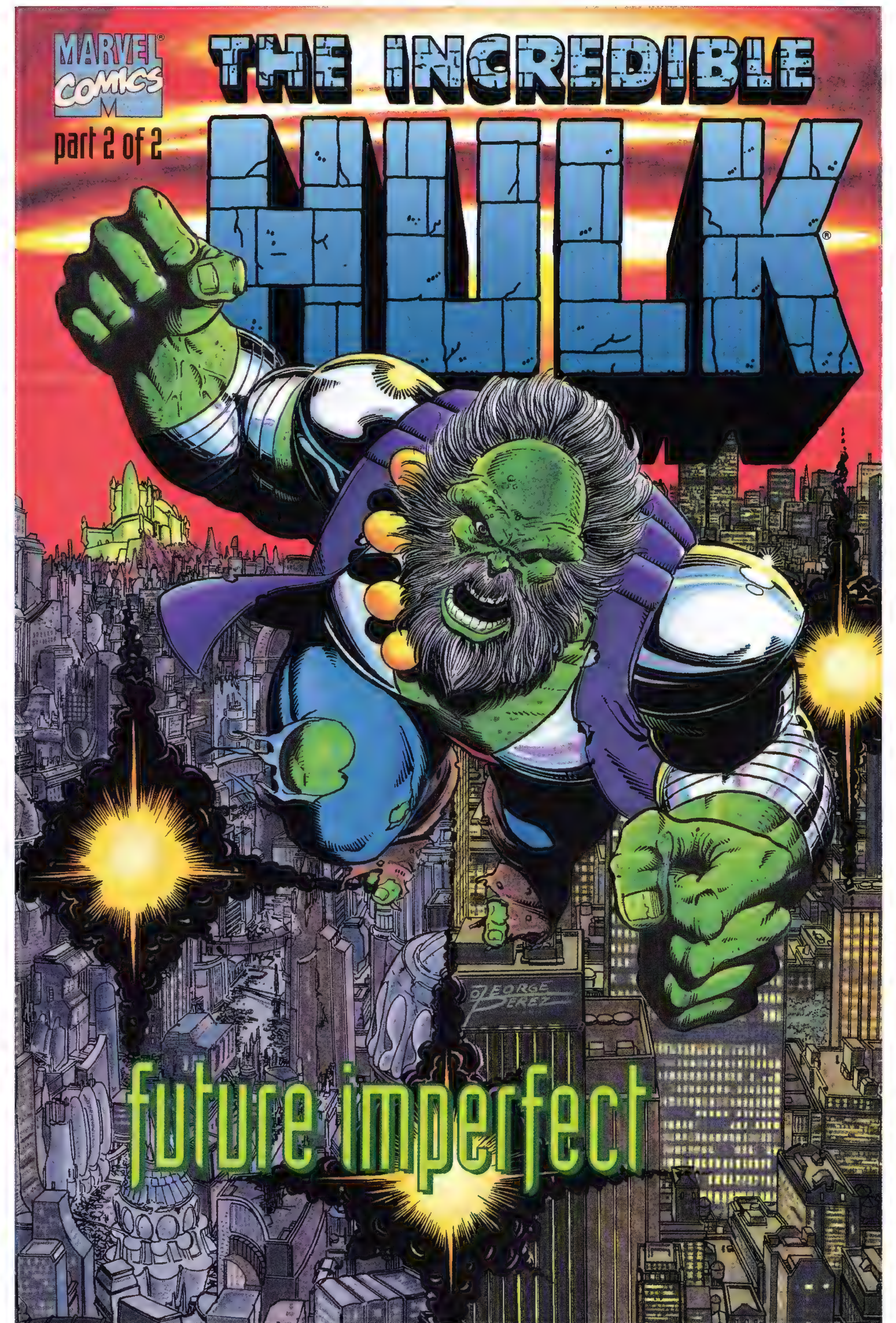
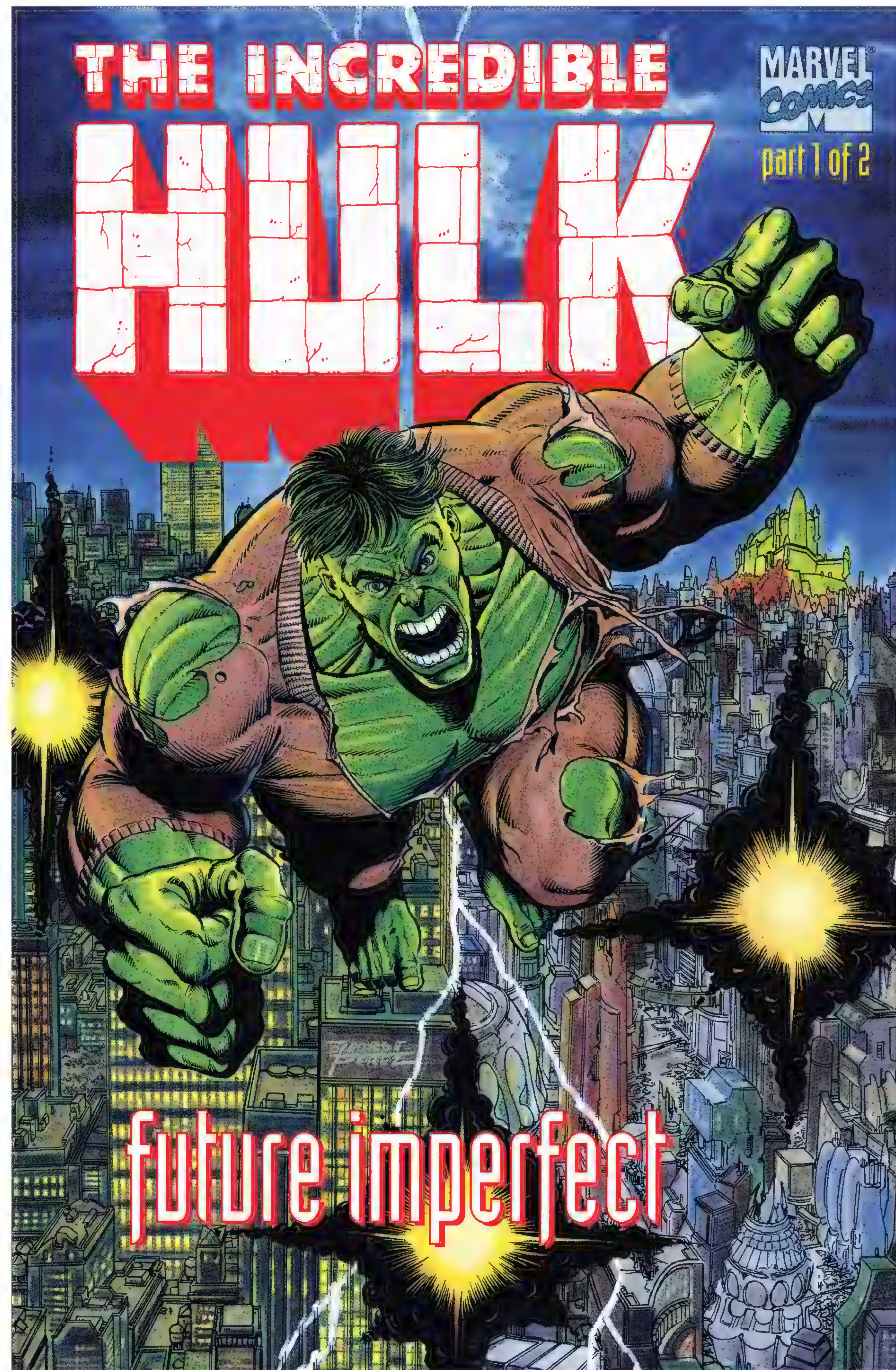
The book called upon Pérez to fully realize this cruel new world with all his trademark detail. And, as ever, Pérez's desire to prove himself by completing the project competed with his burning need to constantly challenge himself—so he elected to not only pencil the series, but ink it as well. "That was, at the time, the longest project I had both penciled and inked. I had the challenge of inking myself, punishing me the way I had punished all other inkers. But I actually go out of my way to make it even more difficult for me! I want to show how much love I have for the actual business of drawing."

Though the deadline wasn't as tight as a regular series, there was still a deadline to hit. "That meant, when I started to slow down, I had to find ways of inking faster," Pérez



says. "I was working extra-long days, and at one point they did offer to bring an inker in. But I said, no, I've got to finish this."

To get to the deadline, Pérez worked 72 hours without resting, and his terrified wife came home to find him slumped in the chair in front of the television. "I didn't respond when she called me and she was scared that I had worked myself to death," he says. "I was fine, it was just my body gave out. I remember it was a feeling I had back when I did *Crisis on Infinite Earths*—the idea of saying: this is my last issue, the book has an ending. It was done. I did it all! Whenever I can finish a project, I take great pride in that."





“When George sent me the pencils of the two-page crowd scene in the first issue, I said, ‘You know what it needs? Waldo from *Where’s Waldo?*’ When we got the inked version, there was Waldo. Yes, he’s really in there. No, I’m not kidding. Go find him.”
— PETER DAVID

Working from David’s very detailed plot, which provided a “very good road map” to creating this literal dystopia, Pérez channeled the work of European artists including Moebius. “I wanted to give it less of a typical George Pérez super hero look,” he says. “My line work was deliberately crude, I needed to make it look rough. I didn’t want anything to be smooth, so it allowed me to do all that extra Philippe Druillet noodling. I wanted texture.”

Finding the right colorist in newcomer Tom Smith was an essential part of bringing this hellscape to life, Pérez says. “It was Tom’s first major work and, according to him, it was his big break. One of the things I had noticed about European artists is how many of them rely on almost like a water color—that’s what I was going for. By keeping it kind of blotchy, it creates a little more of that dystopian look I wanted.”

Pérez feels his art can be hard to color, because he puts so much line work in that “sometimes the colors get in the way,” but that Smith achieved the perfect balance. “Tom understood what I wanted and, by pulling back and going lighter on certain things, not over-saturating the colors, they looked better and they kept the line clear too. Tom was an incredibly hands-on colorist. He would call me up and we would talk page by page of what I had in mind. Sometimes he and I disagreed—obviously, both being artists, that is bound to happen—but we were able to talk it out. At that time, there were no digital colors, so he was coloring with paint. If he had to make a change,

he would have to paint over. Tom never faltered, he never complained, and there was nothing he wouldn’t do, which is why Tom and I have worked together so many times since. There was somebody out there who was willing to do as much with the coloring as I was doing with the line work! It created a lasting relationship and we are friends to this day.”

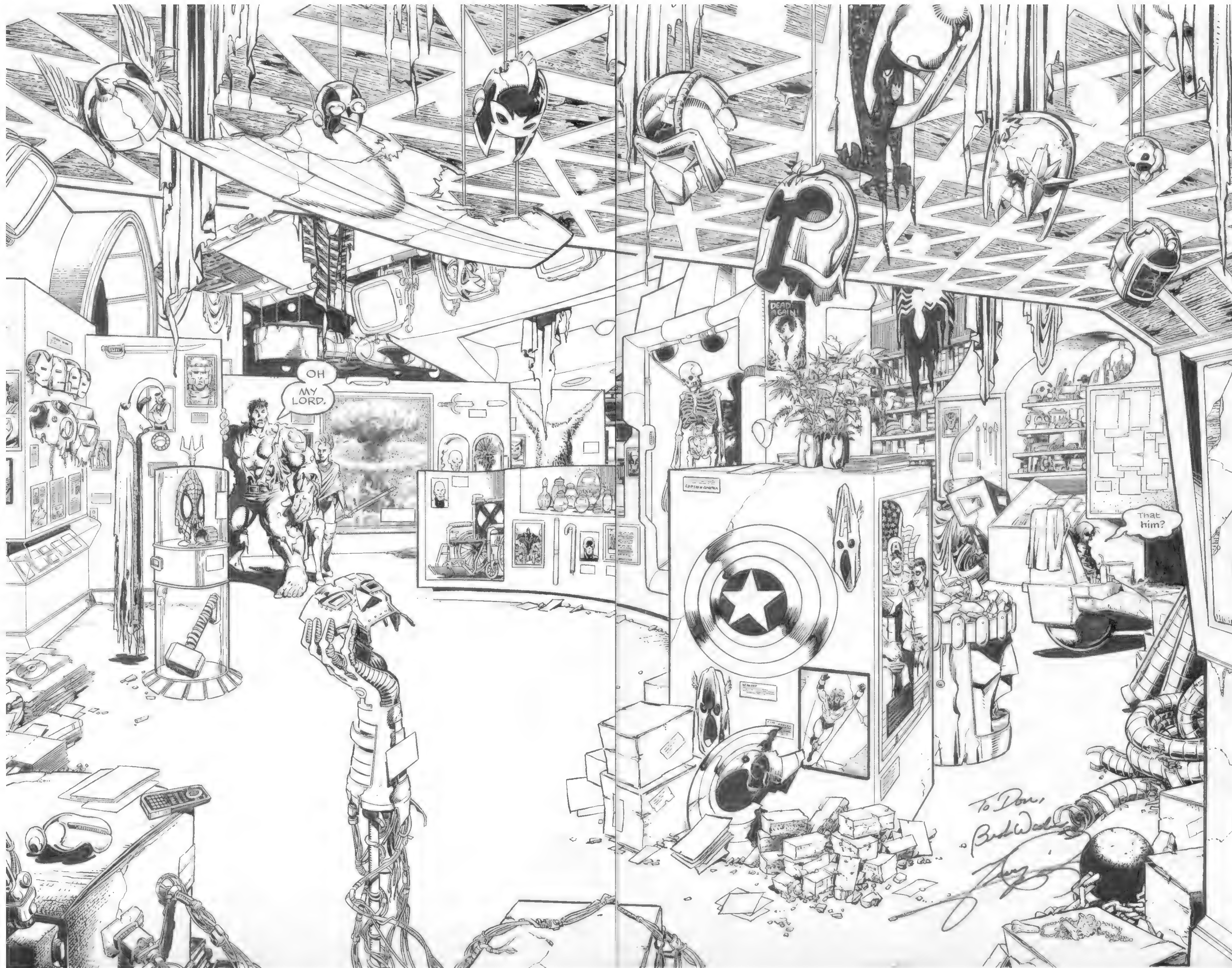
Together, Pérez and Smith took this imperfect future, and made it real. “Then, of course,” Pérez adds, “me being me, I made it an enormous Easter Egg hunt.” Among the visual highlights of the story’s densely packed pages are a character-filled double-page spread featuring a notable cameo worth searching for, and Pérez’s famous depiction of the hall of relics of fallen super heroes, curated by the Hulk’s old friend Rick Jones—very old, in fact, in the world of *Future Imperfect*. “To give it a certain sense of realism, I found the layout of an actual museum exhibition area,” Pérez says. “Since all these characters are dead, I could show things like the pelt of the Beast, the rocky remains of the Thing, Wolverine’s skeleton without the skin. I thought, OK, this is going to be fun. In a fit of inspiration, and being a bit of an impish prankster, I thought, what if I sneak in stuff that isn’t really part of the Marvel Universe in the background? It just ballooned, the more obscure the better. I wanted to give the reader something to go back to and look at again. It was the equivalent of adding more characters—I was adding more recognizable artifacts from the comics industry.”

And then, there was the villain of the piece—whose name, amusingly to Pérez, was the same as the nickname he has been lovingly given by his legions of fans. And so, when

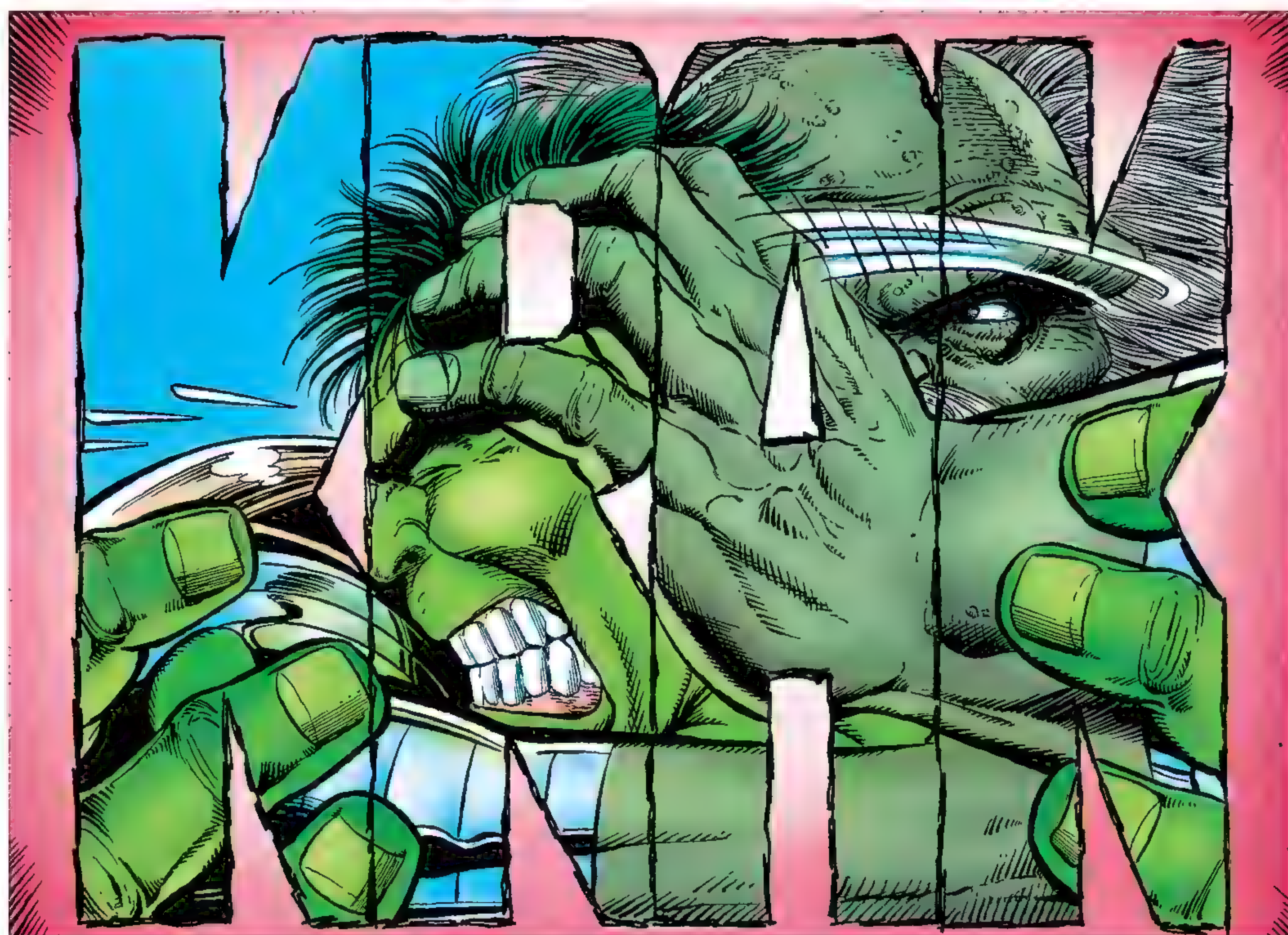
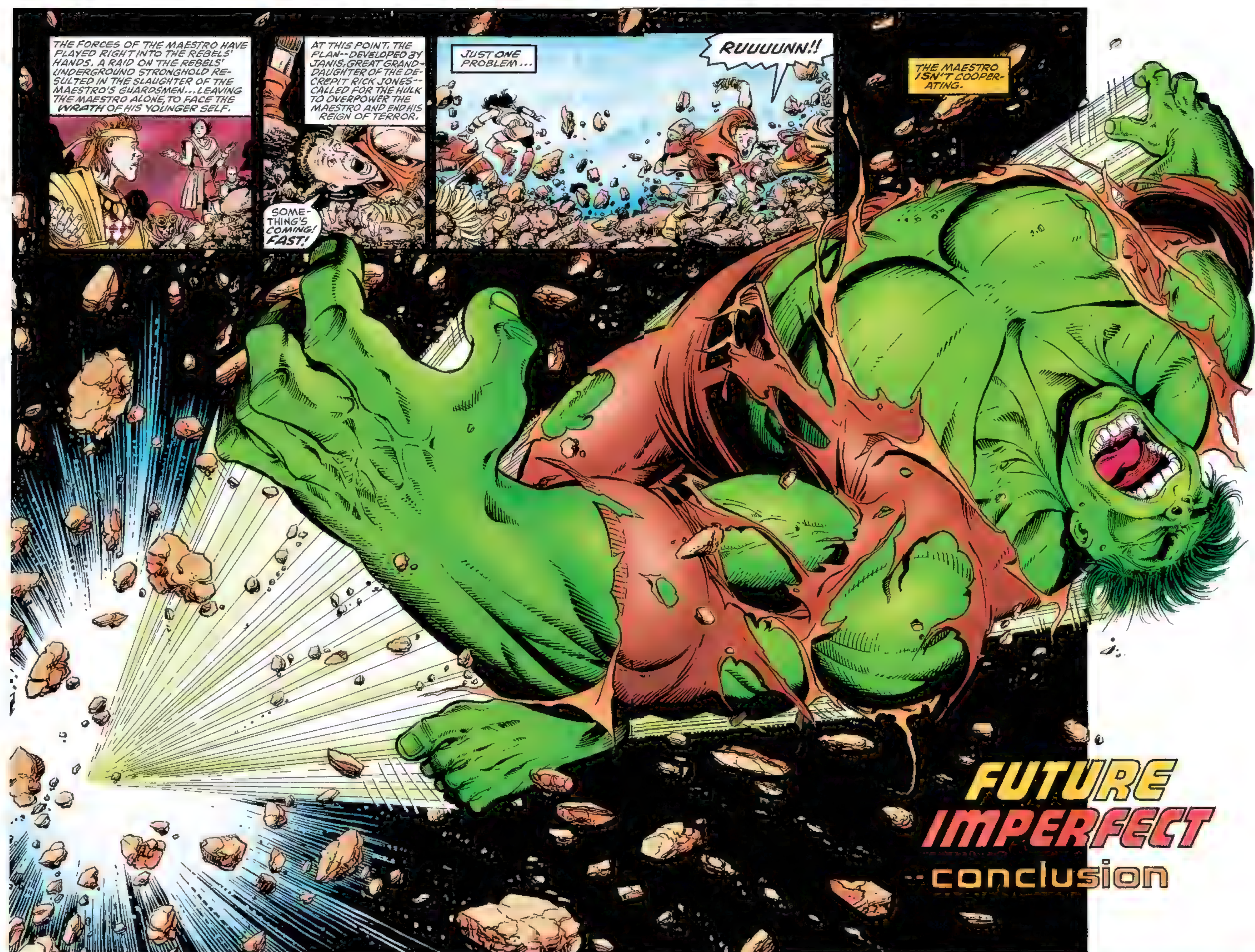


OH
MY
LORD.

That
him?



“With Rick Jones’ trophy room, I feel confident in saying that only Pérez could have pulled it off. I take minimal credit for it: The only things I specified were Wolverine’s skeleton, Cap’s shield, the Surfer’s board, and Thor’s hammer. Everything else came from George’s encyclopedic knowledge of comic book universes. You can stare at that sequence for hours and still come up with new stuff.” — **PETER DAVID**



“The Maestro” came to draw the Maestro, it is perhaps fitting that he gave the character a balding head and facial hair—though the similarities most assuredly end there.

"Peter described a bearded, radiation-scarred Hulk," Pérez says. "I think I came up with the idea of making him practically bald by having all the hair come up to the sides. It gave him a distinct look. I still get a lot of requests to draw the Maestro as, over the years, he has become more integral in the overall Marvel Universe, as opposed to just a speculative future that may or may not ever exist. We hit paydirt."

David describes the contributions of Pérez and colorist Tom Smith as “vital” to the enduring popularity of *Future Imperfect*—and indeed of the Maestro, to whom the writer returned in a 2020 series that featured Pérez variant covers on its first two issues. “Yes, patting myself on the back, I think it’s a good story,” David says. “But if George and Tom hadn’t come through so brilliantly on the pages, I don’t know that it would have been as memorable. As for the Maestro, his description came from me. But his presence, his sheer ferocity, all came from George. With any story I write, I have a mental image of what I want it to be. If an average issue turns out around 70 percent of what I envisioned, I’m happy with that. George’s art always gives me 100 percent every time. He is a true writer’s artist. The phrase ‘one of a kind’ is so overused, but in this case it’s wholly appropriate—George is one of the greatest artists to ever wield a pencil.”

In turn, Pérez describes working with David as a “joy,” adding: “He has a wonderfully wicked sense of humor and a very strong and punchy storytelling style.” The pair immediately renewed their collaboration with 1993’s more adult-oriented *Sachs & Violens* for Marvel’s Epic imprint.

This one “happy accident” resulted in lasting friendships and a Hulk story for the ages. But more than that, it showed Marvel fans what the modern-day Pérez was truly capable of—and left them wanting more.

“One cannot say enough about George’s contribution to the series: His monumental storytelling sense, his legendary attention to detail. George was game for anything.”

— PETER DAVID





CHAPTER EIGHT

A HEROIC RETURN

“It was time to go back home.”

That much was true for both George Pérez and the Avengers. The latter had, together with the Fantastic Four, spent a year in the world (and publishing initiative) of “Heroes Reborn”—completely reimagined in a fresh reality by returning superstar creators including Jim Lee and Rob Liefeld. As the experiment came to an end in 1997, the characters were set to make their comeback to the Marvel Universe in a celebratory relaunch titled “Heroes Return.”

As for Pérez, he had played his part in the Avengers’ 30th anniversary in 1993, illustrating a character-filled poster framed by images of the Wasp wearing all of her costumes (including one specifically designed for the celebration) as well as providing the cover for the Handbook-style *Avengers Log* in 1994. He stretched his writing muscles on *Silver Surfer* in 1995, beginning a run that included the crossover special *Silver Surfer / Superman* the following year, but which was cut unfortunately short by the untimely death of his editor, Mark Gruenwald. However, Pérez’s pencils remained in high demand, and he reaped the financial rewards that the comic book boom provided, taking on work with new publishers including Topps Comics and Malibu, and finding that he could earn “three or four times as much money per page” as he had at Marvel or DC. But he found many of the characters he had to work on, including the super-team Ultraforce for Malibu, somewhat derivative. “I realized I was not enjoying myself,”





he says. “I didn’t have that same personal affection for the characters. Why was I drawing the substitutes when I could draw the real thing?”

He got a taste of what he was missing when Marvel bought Malibu, giving him the chance to draw first Thor, then the Avengers in inter-imprint crossovers. “I realized, oh gosh, I missed Thor,” he says. “Those were the characters I wanted to go back to doing. Those are the characters I grew up with. I was with my family again.”

The stars aligned as editor Ralph Macchio searched for talent for Heroes Return. Macchio and Pérez had actually discussed a graphic novel starring Earth’s Mightiest Heroes that had been derailed by Heroes Reborn. “*Avengers: Haven or Hell?*,” Pérez explains, “would have been an *Upstairs, Downstairs* version of the Avengers focused on Jarvis and, at the time, the large mansion staff.” Now though, Macchio was offering his old friend the chance to write and draw the actual *Avengers* title.

“I needed something big to do,” Pérez says. “I needed something to be my comeback, as it were—but I knew I couldn’t write it. The amount of research would have been way too high. So I asked for one of two writers: either Mark Waid or Kurt Busiek, because I knew their encyclopedic knowledge of the characters.”

When Busiek got the call, there could only be one answer. As the writer puts it: “Maybe it was alphabetical order. Maybe Mark was busy on other things. But they called me. And so Mark didn’t get a call, because I said yes too fast. It was very flattering to be trusted by an artist like George.”

Tom Brevoort, who actually came to edit the book, describes Macchio as “right on the money” in the creators he recruited. “George was already one of the most popular creators who had ever been on *Avengers*,” Brevoort says. “And he’d not really drawn the characters on any kind of regular basis for almost two decades—during which time, his skills had improved considerably. But the joke at the time after George was announced on *Avengers* was, ‘So who’s going to draw issue #2?’”

Pérez’s reputation for unreliability was, at this point, preceding him. The artist adds: “According to Mark Waid, there was a bit of a pool going on, but I double-crossed everyone because I beat the odds of all the people who were involved in Heroes Return: Alan Davis [on *Fantastic Four*], Ron Garney [on *Captain America*] and Sean Chen [on *Iron Man*]. I was the only one who not only lasted the first six issues straight, but the whole first year—including two double-sized issues.”

Pérez recalls there had also been skepticism from retailers at the idea of following the ultra-modern visuals of Heroes Reborn with an “old-school” artist. “They thought that was probably not going to be a big success,” he says, “but I didn’t take it personally, it just made me work harder. I wasn’t going to change my style to suit the market. I just draw the best I can and hope that my enthusiasm is noticeable on the page. The book was a critical and financial success—it never left the top ten the entire time I was on the book.”

For Pérez, this was a double triumph. “They didn’t question my talent, but they did question my marketability and my reliability,” he says. “I managed to vindicate myself on both counts. The old man managed to keep up with the youngsters—and outrace them.”

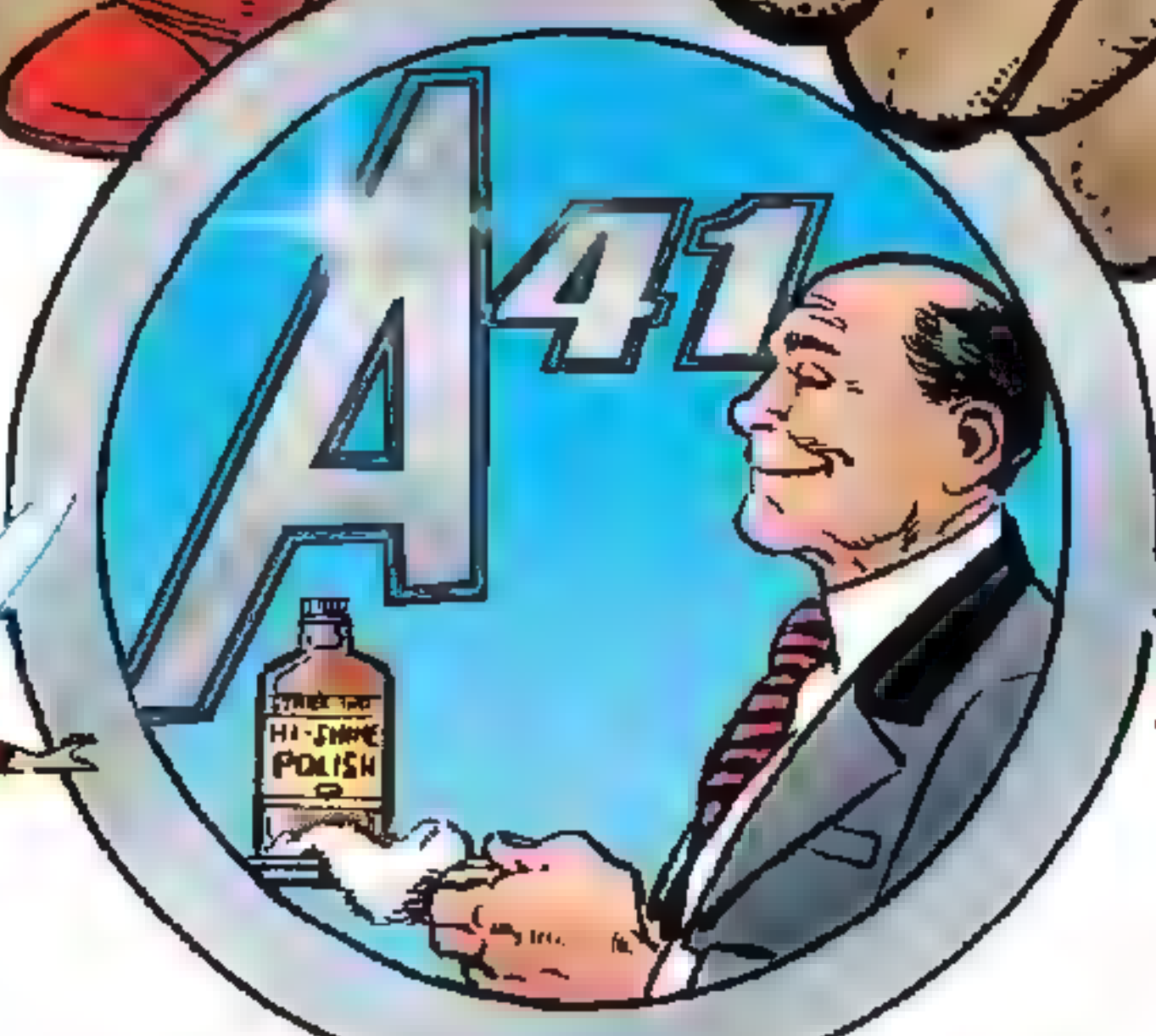
One of Pérez’s favorite stories is how, at a store signing during his *Avengers* run, a young fan told him: “You’re gonna be the next Todd McFarlane.” Pérez laughs: “I loved that—for him, I was the new kid. He had grown up reading comics in the Image period, he loved those artists like McFarlane and Lee—but now he also loved my work. To him, I was the fresh kid on the block, because my style was now different to what he was used to. It is a wonderful feeling if you can be new to somebody. If you can inspire somebody when they pick up your work for the very first time, you feel you are really doing your job.”

Brevoort agrees that Pérez had “the last laugh on all of his detractors,” adding: “He proved to people once again that he was fully capable of drawing a regular monthly series, something he hadn’t done over a long haul since his *Wonder Woman* days.”

And while Pérez revived his own fortunes on *Avengers*, the creative synergy he enjoyed with Busiek ensured that the title—which had long languished in the shadow of the more popular X-Men books—was the most exciting it had been in years.

As Busiek puts it: “George was offered *Avengers* because Marvel wanted to say: The Avengers are back. Thrill to the Avengers the way they are supposed to be. But we didn’t just want to do old kinds of stories. I love the Steve Englehart *Avengers*, and the Jim Shooter run and the Michelinie run. I wanted to take that kind of thing as a foundation, not do it again. Let’s build on that baseline. Let’s do new things that draw on that history and that reestablish that atmosphere—but in a modern, compelling way.”

As a starting point, Busiek asked Pérez which Avengers he most wanted to draw. The inevitable answer? “All of them.”



AVENGERS

AVENGERS

11 years later



“It was an exercise in drawing the characters to show that they look individual from each other. For example, I created a face for Wonder Man so that he didn’t look like the other characters. They were all so distinctive looking, and I liked being able to show emotion. As I told Kurt, sometimes there are a lot of characters on a page, and I want their faces to tell some of the story. That was my challenge.”

— GEORGE PÉREZ

“I thought, well, that sounds like fun,” the writer continues. “Let’s do a story that involves everybody alive who was ever an Avenger—and we’ll find a way to throw in some sort of visual cameo of all the ones who aren’t alive. It seemed like a nice way to make a statement early. The Avengers needed to be reestablished. And that was very much our approach.”

Pérez being Pérez, he even put them all on the wraparound cover to *Avengers #1*—starring Captain America charging at the reader with everybody else following behind him. He was looking to create a feel of “epic grandeur”—and he succeeded. “These are your heroes coming at you,” he says. “Characters running towards the reader is one of the most dynamic ways of showing a group—and I was grateful that they allowed me to do a wraparound cover, as that allowed me to draw not just everyone, but everyone getting to do a little bit of their shtick. They are not just a bunch of costumed puppets all rushing at you in the same way like soldiers in a field. Captain America is waving everybody on, Thor’s wielding his hammer, Scarlet Witch is casting a spell...this showed I was back to doing the things I was known for.”

But how, as an artist, do you begin drawing such an image juggling tens of heroes—or more?

“I always make a master list,” Pérez explains, “and check them off as I draw them. First I have to figure out scale—Giant-Man, or Goliath, he has to be in the background, and the Wasp has to be the closest because she is tiny. I have to remember what characters can run, what characters can fly, what characters have the ability to stretch across the graphic or can be throwing something—and how I can make them interrelate with each other without being too distracting. Thankfully it is something that I have become known for—and very much a natural thing for me to do.”

Having assembled all the Avengers, Busiek set about really making things interesting for Pérez in *#2*—by transforming them all into medieval versions of themselves in a reality rewritten by the sorceress Morgan le Fay. That meant new names and new costumes for almost everybody—from Yeoman America, Iron Knight, and Donar to Heracles, Lady Marvel, and Sir MacHinery. The experience felt familiar.

“Kurt did the same to me that Steve Englehart did on my run on *Avengers* back in the 1970s,” Pérez says. “In Steve’s case, the Avengers went to the Old West so he could do the Marvel Western characters. Kurt wanted this story with Morgan le Fay. I was



excited by all these Arthurian versions of Avengers and Kurt’s incredibly creative names that he kept coming up with. They were wonderful. I saw the names in the plot and I thought, this is so inspired. With *Avengers*, I wanted this to count, I wanted to work hard to prove I could still do it. Kurt rose to the challenge magnificently and I was running on full charge, doing a lot of extra detail work, with all the Avengers that had ever been at the time. It was a magnificent story for me to work on.”

Busiek and Pérez followed “The Morgan Conquest” by choosing their initial roster—a suitably classic lineup filled with characters Pérez had grown up reading (and illustrated before), with a sprinkling of fresh blood. The “big three” of Captain America, Iron Man, and Thor were joined by stalwart allies Scarlet Witch, the Vision and Hawkeye, with Carol “Ms. Marvel” Danvers in her new guise of Warbird. And two members of the New Warriors graduated to the big leagues: the young couple Firestar and Justice. For Pérez, adding new members is part of the Avengers mythos, going all the way back to Cap’s “Kooky Quartet,” and Firestar in particular fit the bill. “Firestar gave me something I wanted, another female character in there,” he says. “Kurt made her a reluctant heroine. It added a nice character bit to her and her relationship with Justice. They were fun to do, particularly her as she had a very dynamic power.”

Playing to the artist’s strengths in choreographing super-team battles, the Avengers went up against the Squadron Supreme (both another echo of Pérez’s earlier run and something of an appetizer for a more seismic showdown yet to come), the Legion of the Unliving, and the villains-disguised-as-heroes known as the Thunderbolts, who Busiek had introduced to the Marvel Universe. The creative duo debuted two brand-new characters as potential Avengers—the athletic Triathlon and Silverclaw, a young girl from South America with the power to transform into various animals. They brought Wonder Man back from the dead in a new, dynamic ionic form—and his romantic attraction to the Scarlet Witch, plus their complicated relationships with his “brother,” the Vision, provided much of the soap opera required by any golden *Avengers* era. With Simon back in town, Busiek and Pérez took the opportunity to have the Beast swing by for a visit—a consolation to both creators for the disappointment that they couldn’t pry him away from the X-books more permanently. Then, after Pérez finally did take a breather during three issues illustrated by Jerry Ordway, they collaborated on their biggest story of all, featuring the Avengers’ deadliest enemy, Ultron. Or rather, a whole army of them.

“We wanted to do an ultimate Ultron story,” Pérez says. “Kurt came up with a way of making Ultron even more deadly. The action was worldwide, so it had a lot of location

PORTRAIT ARTIST PAR EXCELLENCE, PÉREZ
DREW CORNER BOX HEADSHOTS OF EVERY
HERO WHO HAD EVER BEEN AN AVENGER

ARTWORK COURTESY OF
HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM.



“You never know what is going to be successful or iconic.

That first page of *Avengers #1*, I had no idea that it would be used everywhere.

I just wanted to do a nice statue of the original Avengers—with obvious cheating, because both Kurt and I believed that Captain America really made the Avengers *the Avengers*. I wanted to draw something that said this is the Avengers—the heroes are returning.” —

GEORGE PÉREZ

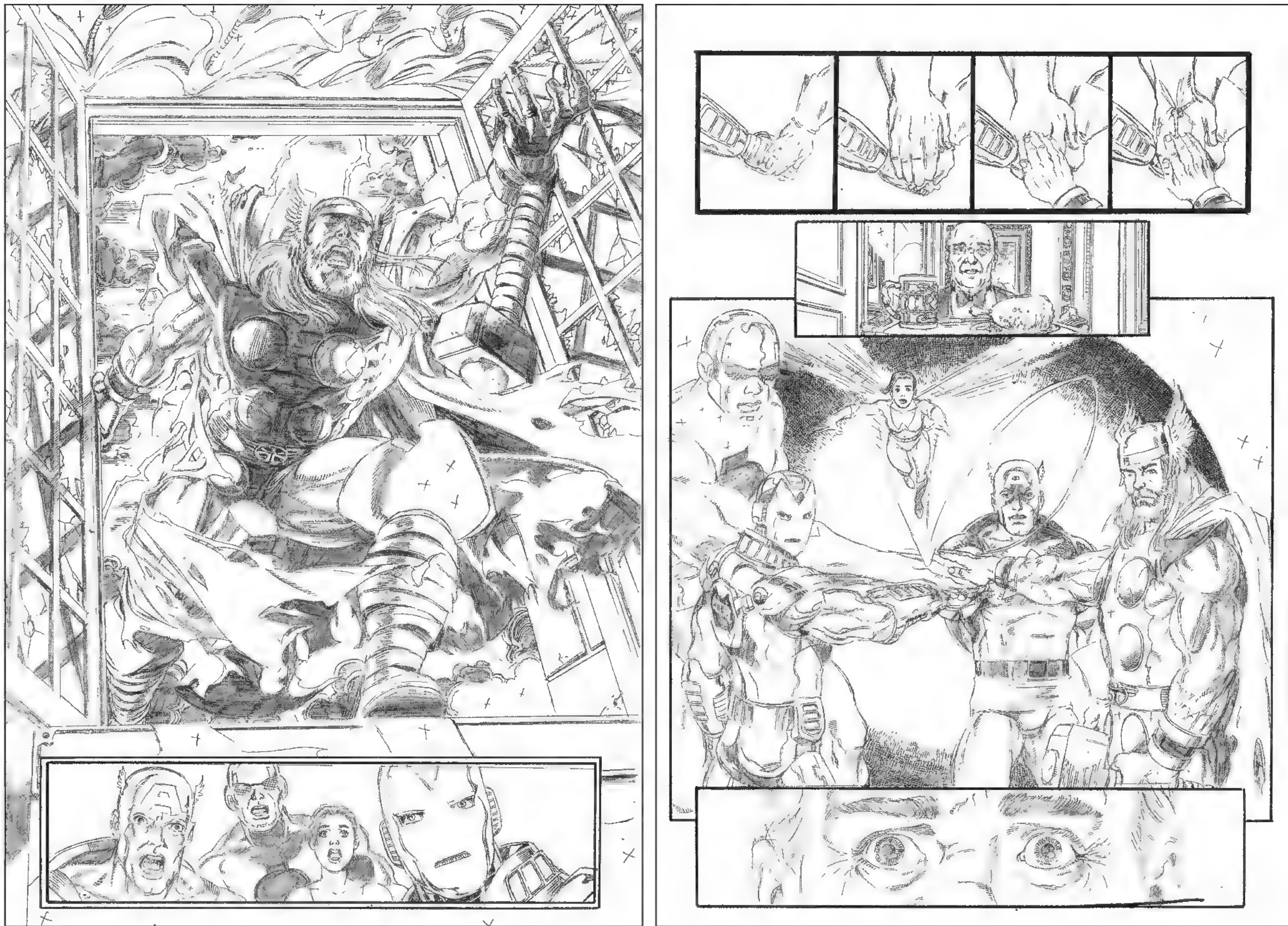


work, a lot of grandeur to it. People look on it fondly as one of the high points of our run on *Avengers*.”

For Busiek, “Ultron Unlimited”—like “The Morgan Conquest” before it—was the kind of story that showed that the Avengers really are Earth’s Mightiest Heroes. “*Avengers* was the heroic spine of the Marvel Universe,” he says. “This was where the big stuff happened. They were smack in the middle of it. And that’s how it was supposed to be.”

And no matter how big a tale he came up with, Pérez only made it more epic. “It was occasionally like riding an out-of-control roller coaster,” Busiek jokes, “or trying to stay on the rodeo bull, because George is so creative and so energetic. I knew that I could do crazy things like, say, we’re bringing in every living Avenger. Oh, and by the way, we’re giving them all-new names and all-new costumes. And George is like, OK. Then, in ‘Ultron Unlimited,’ here’s one double page splash where George drew, like, 65 Ultrons, I’ve often said that the excitement of working on *Avengers* was that I don’t have the same mental approach that George does. So when I was plotting, I was picturing in my head six panels per page, straightforward comic book storytelling, something drawn by, say, John Buscema. I would think, you know, this is a perfectly solid comic book story





and send it off to George. And when the pages started coming back, it was, like, holy cow! Now it's the Avengers! That made for a very, very energetic and exciting book."

In turn, Pérez hails Busiek as one of the best writers he ever worked with. "I always measure everyone by the gold standard that is Marv Wolfman," the artist says, "but Kurt comes very, very high up there. It was a wonderful collaboration, it was obviously a mutual admiration and he was incredibly talented. He was a great ideas man—I had an absolute joyous time working with Kurt."

Similarly, he enjoyed working with the series' regular inker, Al Vey, and once again with colorist Tom Smith. "Al inked everything—he always accepted a challenge. He was a workhorse and I loved working with him. And Tom always wanted to do a little more. That's what I love about working with people who are willing to work for the love of it, not just for the paycheck. It takes a lot longer to work with me than it does with anyone else."

Visually, one of the striking differences evident when comparing Pérez's two eras of *Avengers* side-by-side is the dramatic improvement in comic book production in between. He welcomes the advances in printing techniques and digital coloring: "It was nice to finally see the industry finally catch up to me in terms of detail." But he is grateful for collaborators like Smith who know how to use the software at their disposal well. "Tom has a knack for storytelling himself. No matter how many fancy tools you have, in the final run you have to have a clear-looking comic that the reader can follow. Sometimes, when you get a new toy, you overplay and I have had issues with colorists, particularly when digital coloring was new. Back at Malibu, I had to remind a colorist that white is also a color. Do not be afraid of white."



But even without the bells and whistles of modern day technology, the evolution of Pérez's style across the decades is clear to see, not least in the sheer individuality of each and every Avenger. The Scarlet Witch, Hawkeye, Wonder Man, the Vision, Quicksilver, Warbird—everyone has his or her own distinctive character, expertly captured by the artist in their unique facial features and way of moving.

"If you compare George's original *Avengers* run with our *Avengers* run, it doesn't look the same," Busiek says. "George has changed as an artist. Underneath that surface recognizability, he had grown and matured and changed and learned from all of the stuff he had done. His sense of how many panels go on a page, of what kind of energy you use or how you handle faces and body language—all of this stuff that makes George *George*."

Busiek believes his collaborator learned a lot about character interaction from doing local theater, adding nuances to their colorful cast that the writer could then pick up on in the dialog. For Pérez, this was always part of his storytelling approach—but now he had mastered it.

"I tried it during the 1970s, but I didn't have the ability at the time," he says. "I wasn't evolved yet. My time at DC was an incredible growth period for me and a lot I learned there eventually manifested itself in *Avengers*. You can bring emotion to a static scene, you can bring excitement to it by having the characters act. That is what I have them do—I have them act. I am proud of what I did in the 1970s because that was the best I could do then. But I was grateful that I showed improvement on that second *Avengers* run to prove that, yes, I had progressed."

But he adds that one of the toughest things about having a long career is constantly trying to live up to your old work: "There are always those who say, 'I preferred your older work.' Of course, I was a young pup then and you can sense I was willing to take risks."

The creative team continued to work in perfect harmony, changing the old order once more with Silverclaw and Triathlon joining a lineup that brought back original Avengers Hank Pym and Janet Van Dyne, as well as fan-favorite She-Hulk. And through it all, *Avengers* remained a best-selling, award-winning title.



But all good things come to an end, and, after almost three years on the book, Pérez elected to go out on top. His health was starting to become more of an issue—he had known he was diabetic since his 30s, and at one point he was hospitalized with blood clots in his leg. The demands of working on a monthly team book, and making it the best it could be, were getting to him.

“I was having a great time,” he says, “but it was taking its toll on me. I was starting to feel tired, it was taking me too long and I didn’t want to start doing less than my best work, or being late all the time. I had Paul Ryan finishing pencils over my layouts for a couple of issues [#32-33] so we saw the writing on the wall. I knew it was time to call it a day. I had a good run, it was well-received and I managed to re-bolster my career. It gave me what Mark Waid described as my ‘John Travolta career’—*Avengers* was my *Pulp Fiction*.”

And so, Pérez went out on top with #34 in the year 2000—and, of course, his swan song on the book was double-sized. It was mission accomplished for the artist, and for Marvel. The glory of the Avengers—their status as the company’s banner heroes—was fully restored, helping pave the way for the characters to finally assemble on the big screen little over a decade later. If anybody had been left in any doubt following his earlier run, Pérez had certainly cemented his place in *Avengers* history now.

“Marvel has been forthright in saying that, of all the people who have worked on *Avengers*, my name seems to be the most synonymous with the group,” Pérez says proudly. “Which



is incredibly flattering, when you think of all the others. When I started, John Buscema was *the Avengers* artist, he was the one I had to compete with. Now the fact that when people think *Avengers*, they think of me? It is nice to have left that kind of legacy. *New Teen Titans*, yes, I did create them with Marv Wolfman. But *Avengers*? To have that kind of impact on a title that meant so much to me as a young reader—that’s a great feeling.”

And he still wasn’t done. Pérez had proven he still had what it took. He had drawn his name into legend with the greatest heroes of Marvel *and* DC. As a new millennium dawned, the only thing left was to do it all over again...with both at the same time.



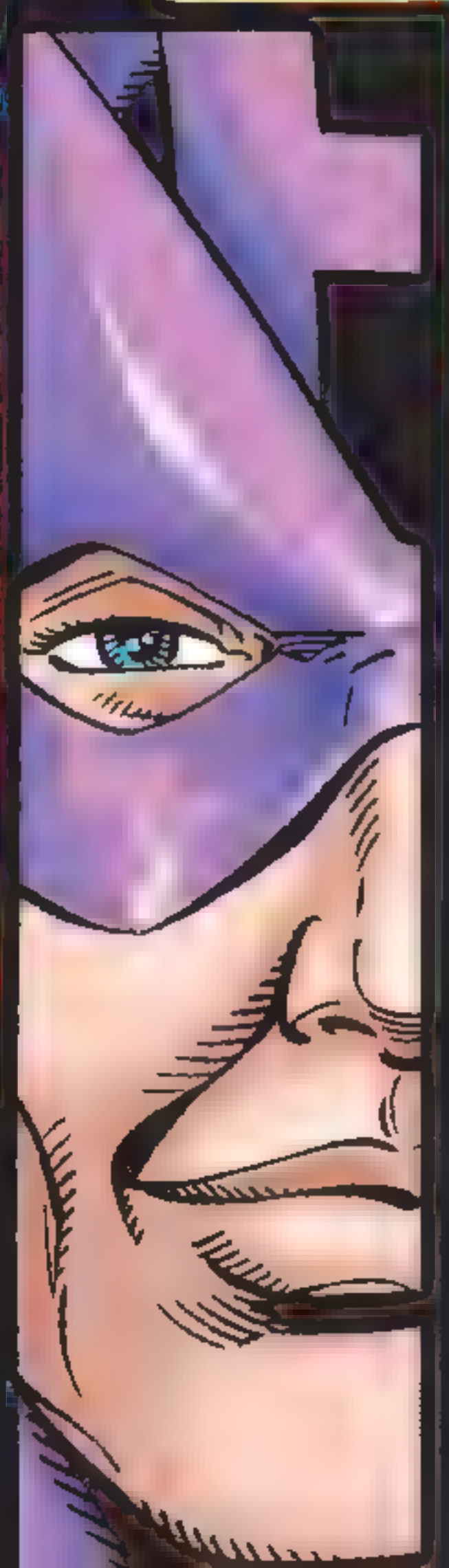
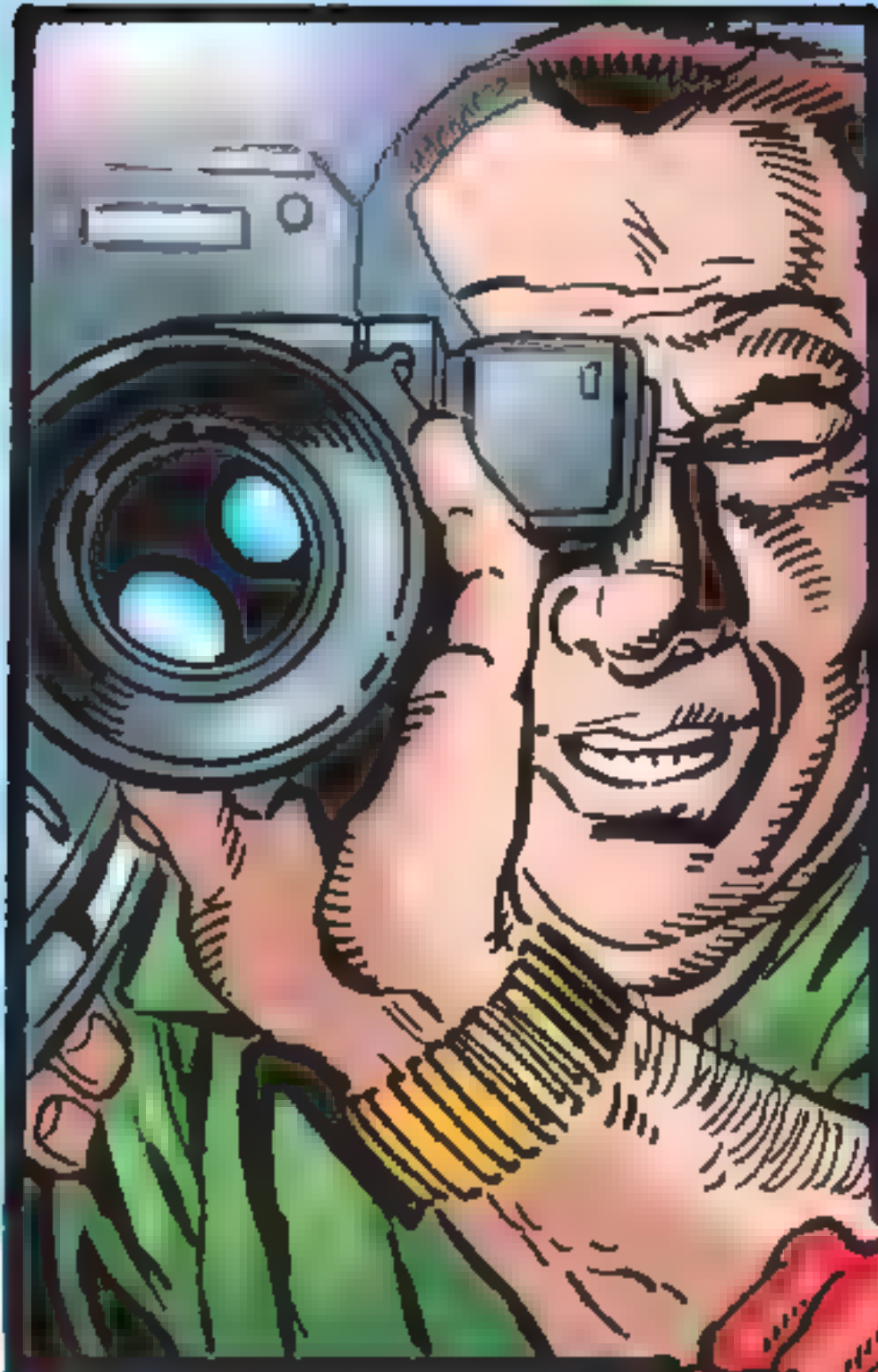
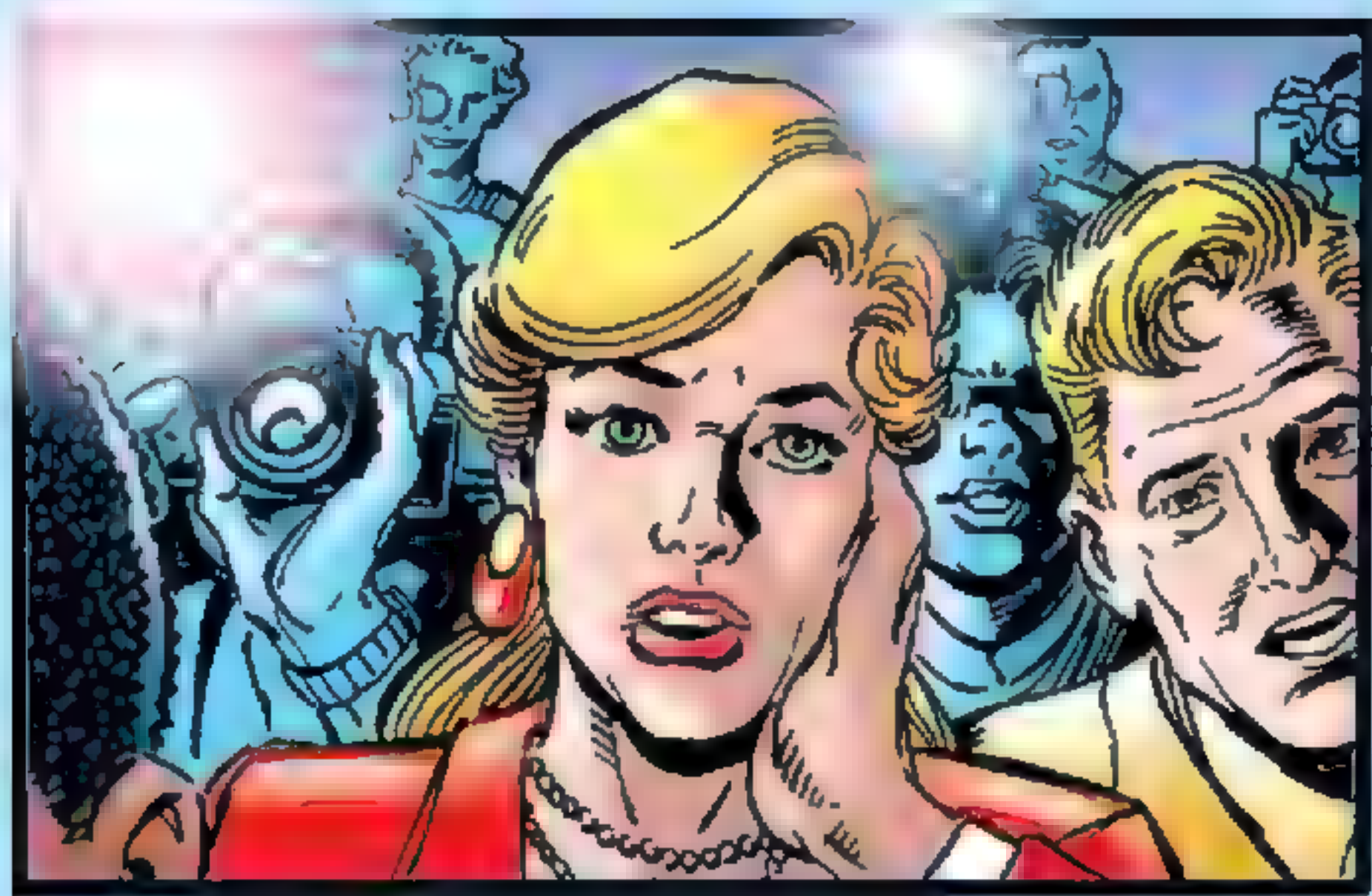
“George did a fantastic job designing the medieval Avengers. They all look great. You could give them their own book. But people really, really liked that Scarlet Witch costume.” — **KURT BUSIEK**



“It was a lot of fun to give Wanda a real distinctive look which made her totally different from any other super heroine in comics. I wanted to give her a slightly Eastern European and Gypsy look. But my version was slightly more modest than it ended up being. In my earlier issues, her skirt was open at one side but it wrapped around. Until Jerry Ordway filled in, he slit it at both sides and I said, oh, that’s very sexy. That became the look of Scarlet Witch from that point on.” — **GEORGE PÉREZ**

















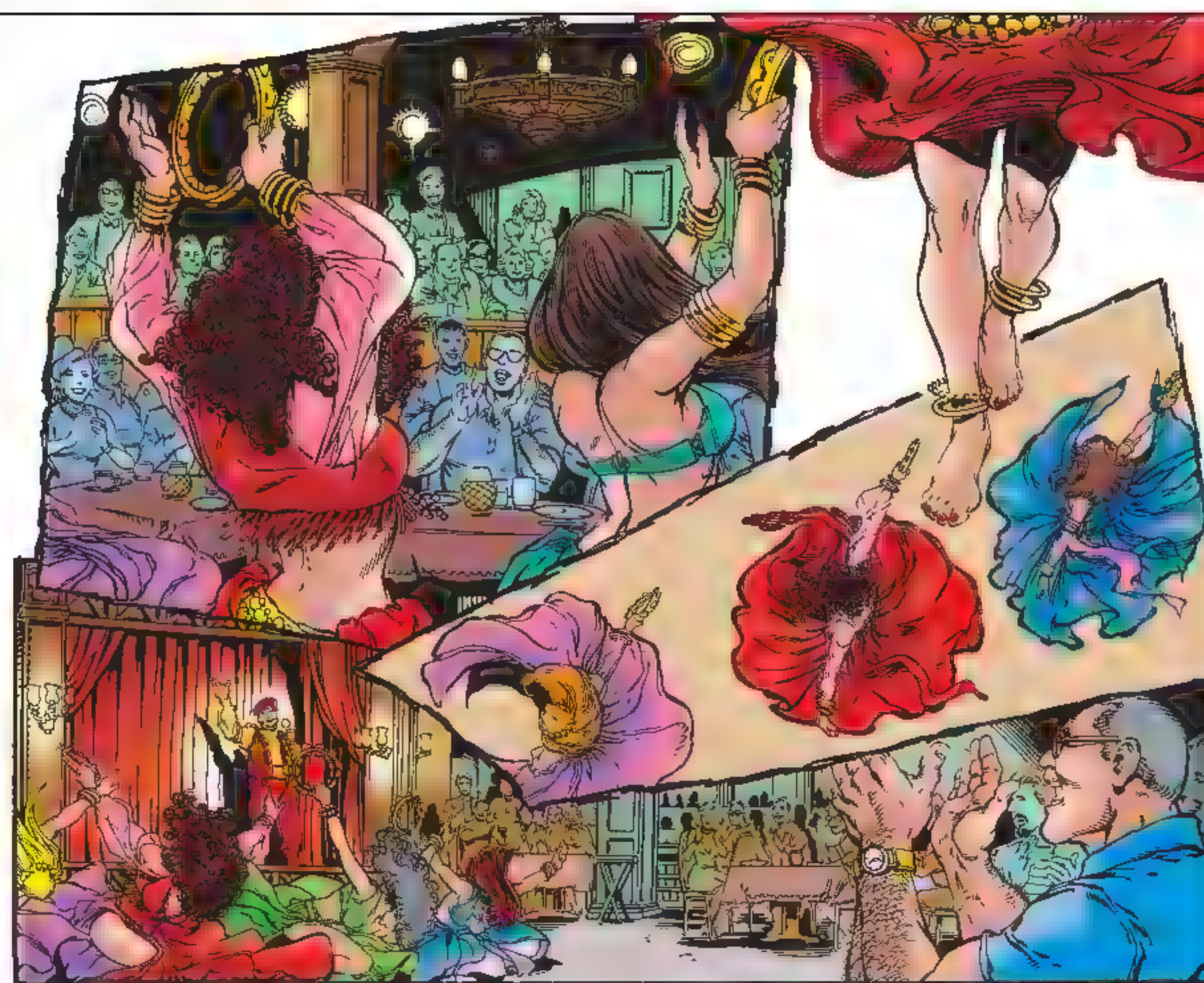


“With the panorama of Avengers villains through history, I gave George a list of, like, 84 characters and said, you don’t have to draw them all. Not only did he draw them all, but he added in a dozen others. That was how *Avengers* worked.”

— KURT BUSIEK

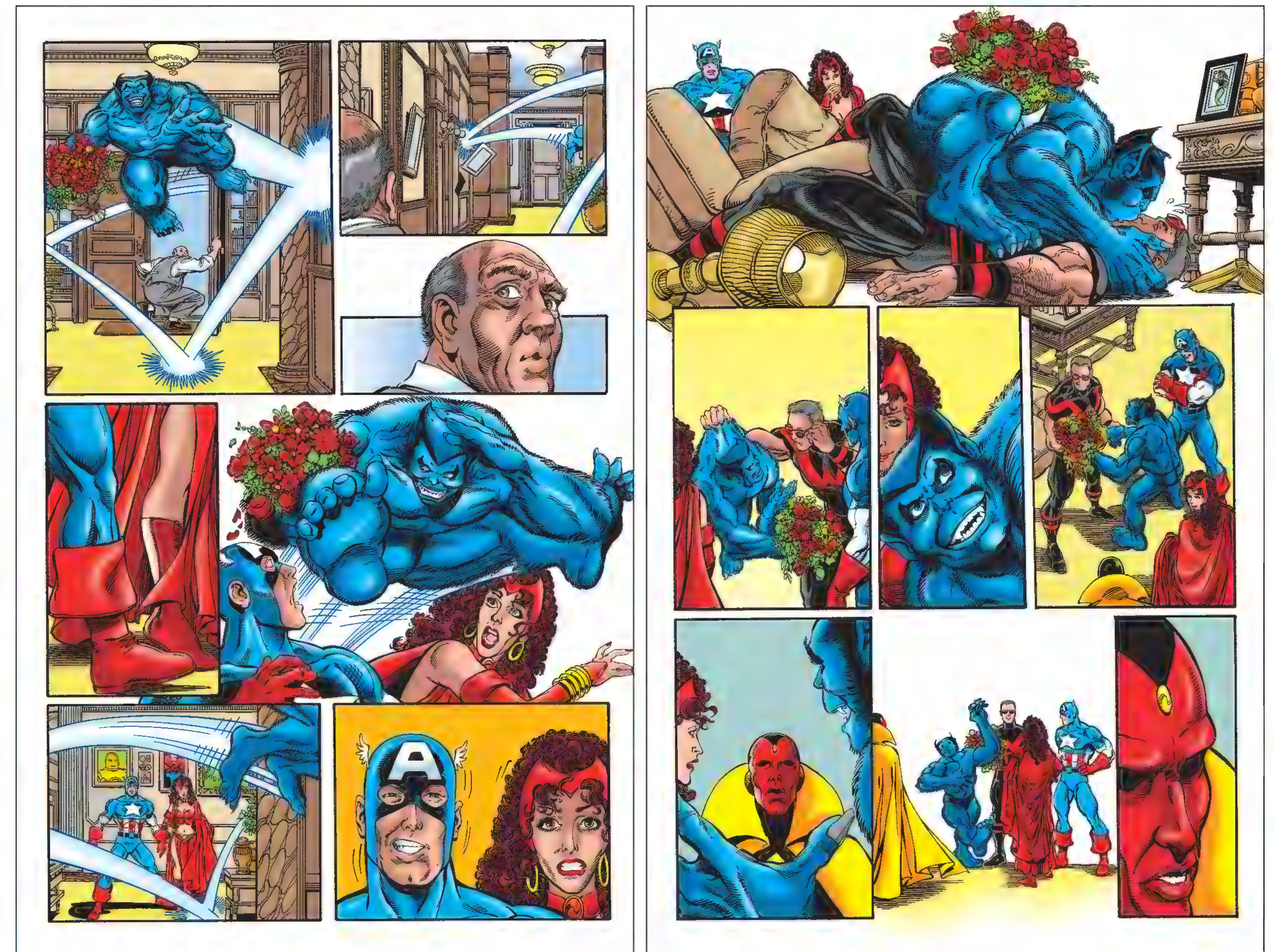






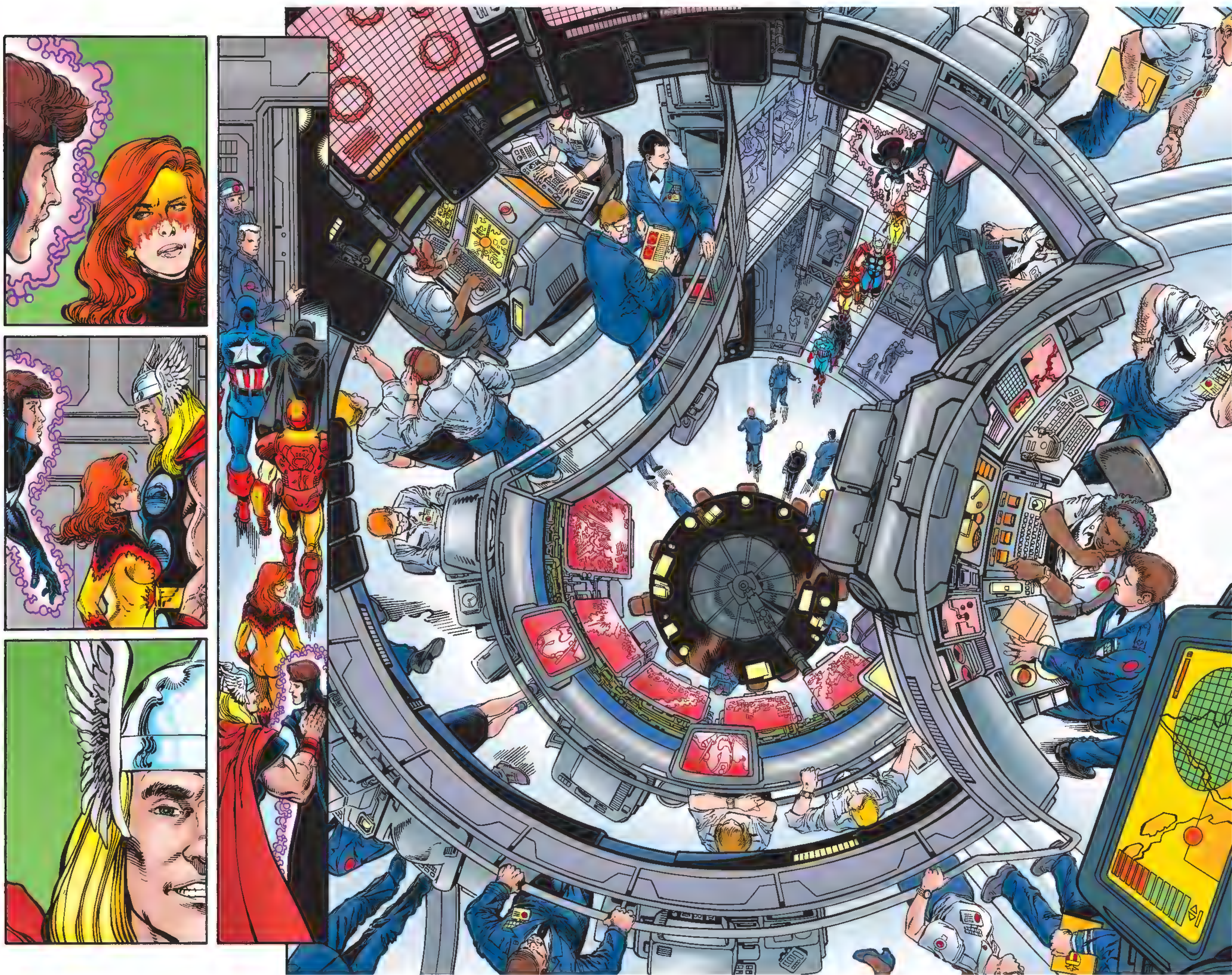
“One of the things I asked Kurt was to please, as much as possible, minimize sound effects. I found them a bit old-fashioned. The action should be in your mind, making you think what the sound effect should be. Plus, I worked too hard on the art to have so much of it covered up unnecessarily.”
— **GEORGE PÉREZ**

“We missed the Beast. A lot of the fans enjoyed him more in the Avengers than in the X-Men. But at least we got one issue, since we already had Wonder Man, doing a nice little homage to old bromance between Simon and Hank. Kurt came up with the idea of sandwiching it with some ‘breaking of the fourth wall’ with appearances of him and me. That was a kick.” — **GEORGE PÉREZ**



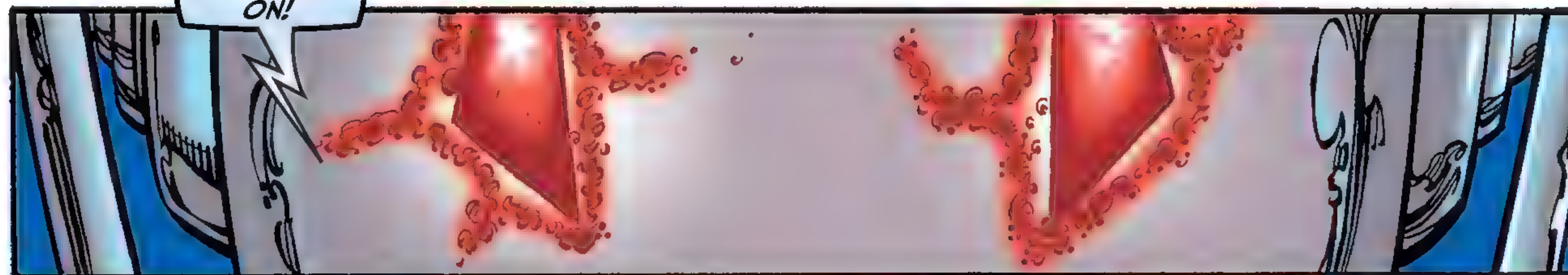
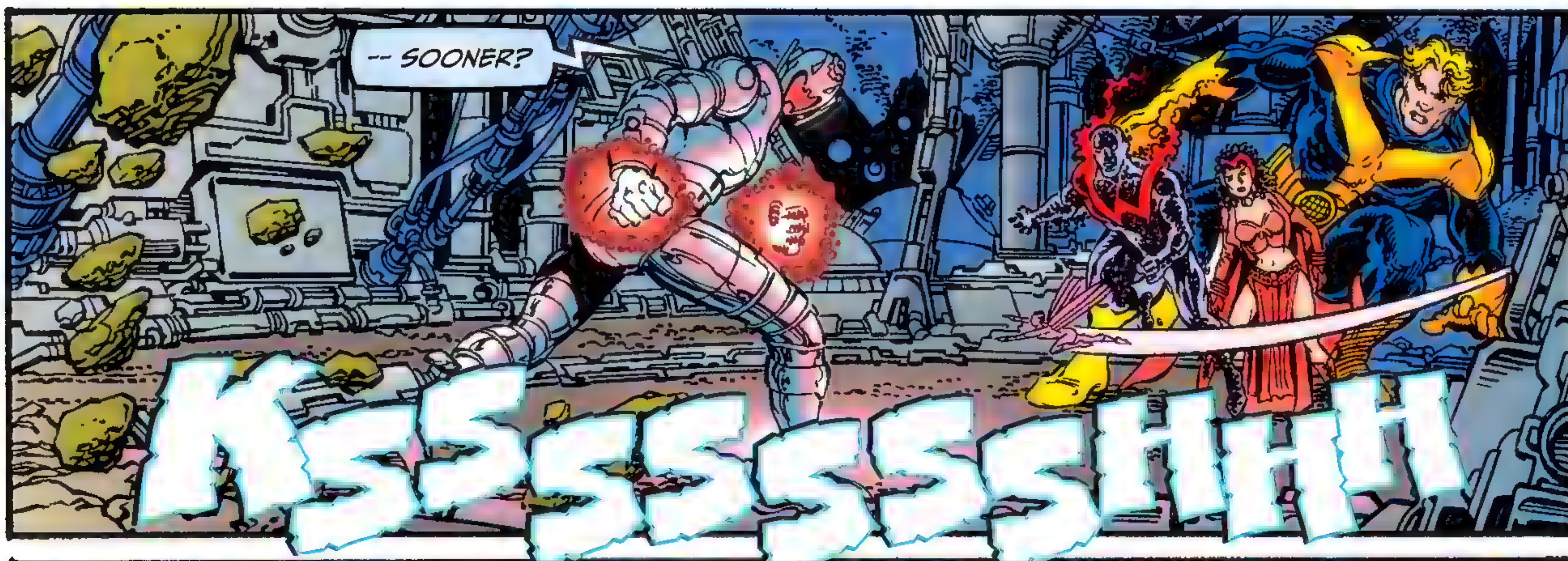


“There’s a double-page sequence where the Avengers are walking into a military installation, and George has drawn it from the top down, looking down on the characters as they walk in and shake hands with this general. Not only is there this high-tech room, but it’s a mezzanine. And through that, we can see there is another level. And through that we can see there’s another level. George drew this absolutely majestic, impactful scene out of ‘Yeah, they walk into this place and shake hands with this guy.’ George never settled for doing things the conventional way. He was always looking for a way to make it more exciting.” — **KURT BUSIEK**









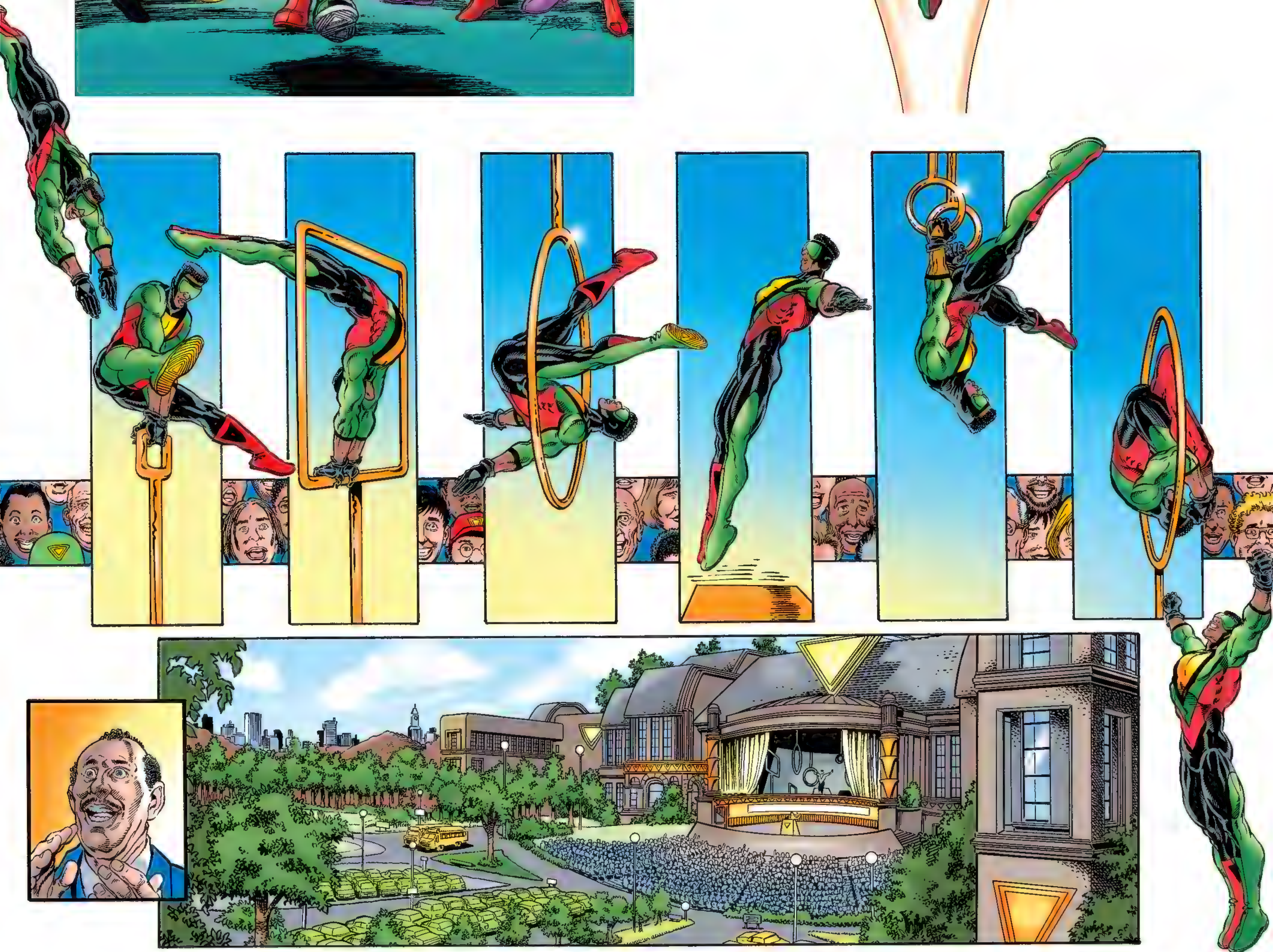
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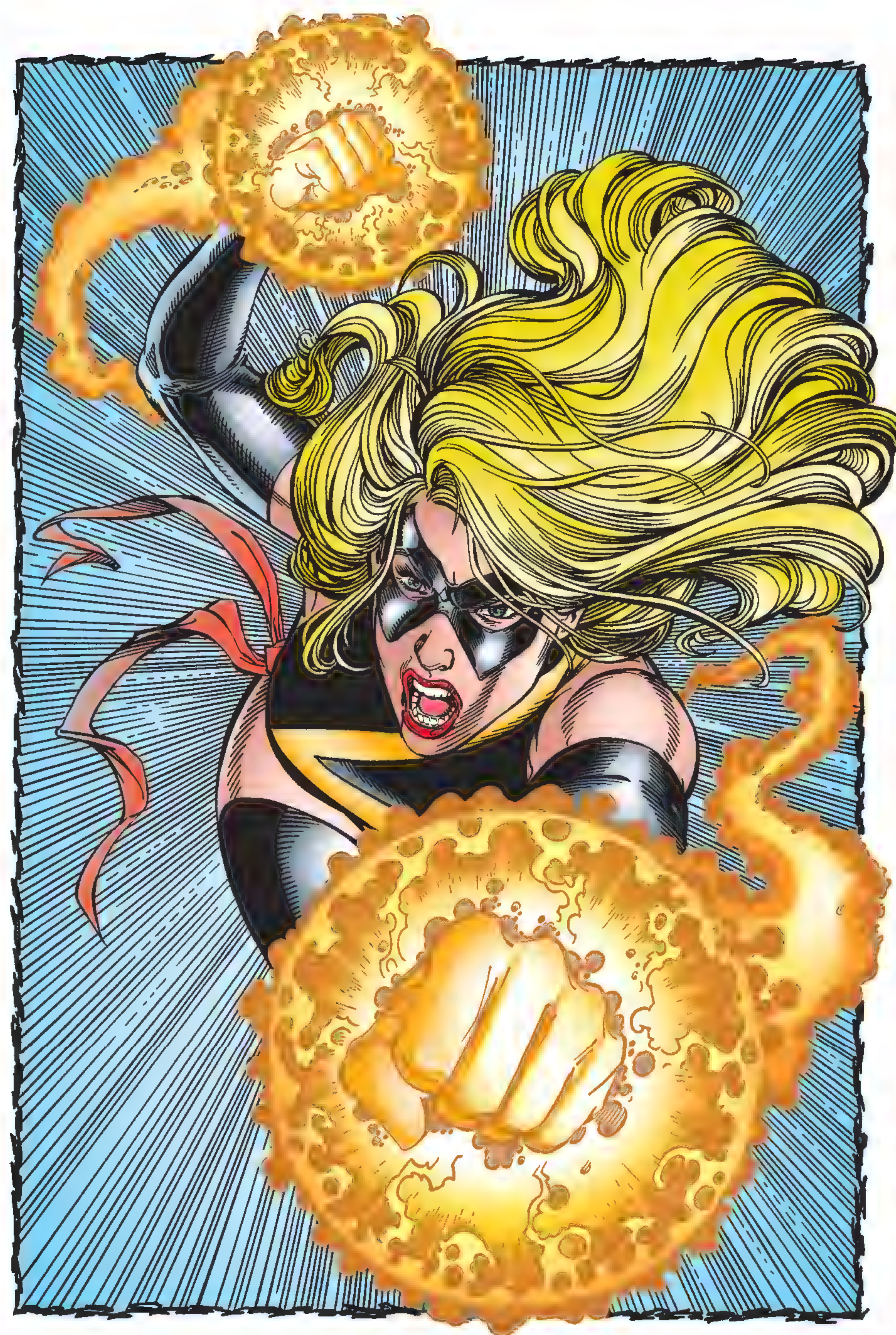


“Silverclaw was interesting because I got to draw these Aztec-type backgrounds, which gave me a new milieu to work in. I gave her a Central American look, and based her on some Hispanic young ladies I remembered from growing up.”
— **GEORGE PÉREZ**



“Triathlon was one of the few characters where I designed the costume. I said, maybe something along these lines, but George drew pretty much exactly what I designed. It wasn’t until Triathlon’s third or fourth appearance that we said, no, George—make it look good. George gave him a better costume. So I get the blame for that one!” — **KURT BUSIEK**



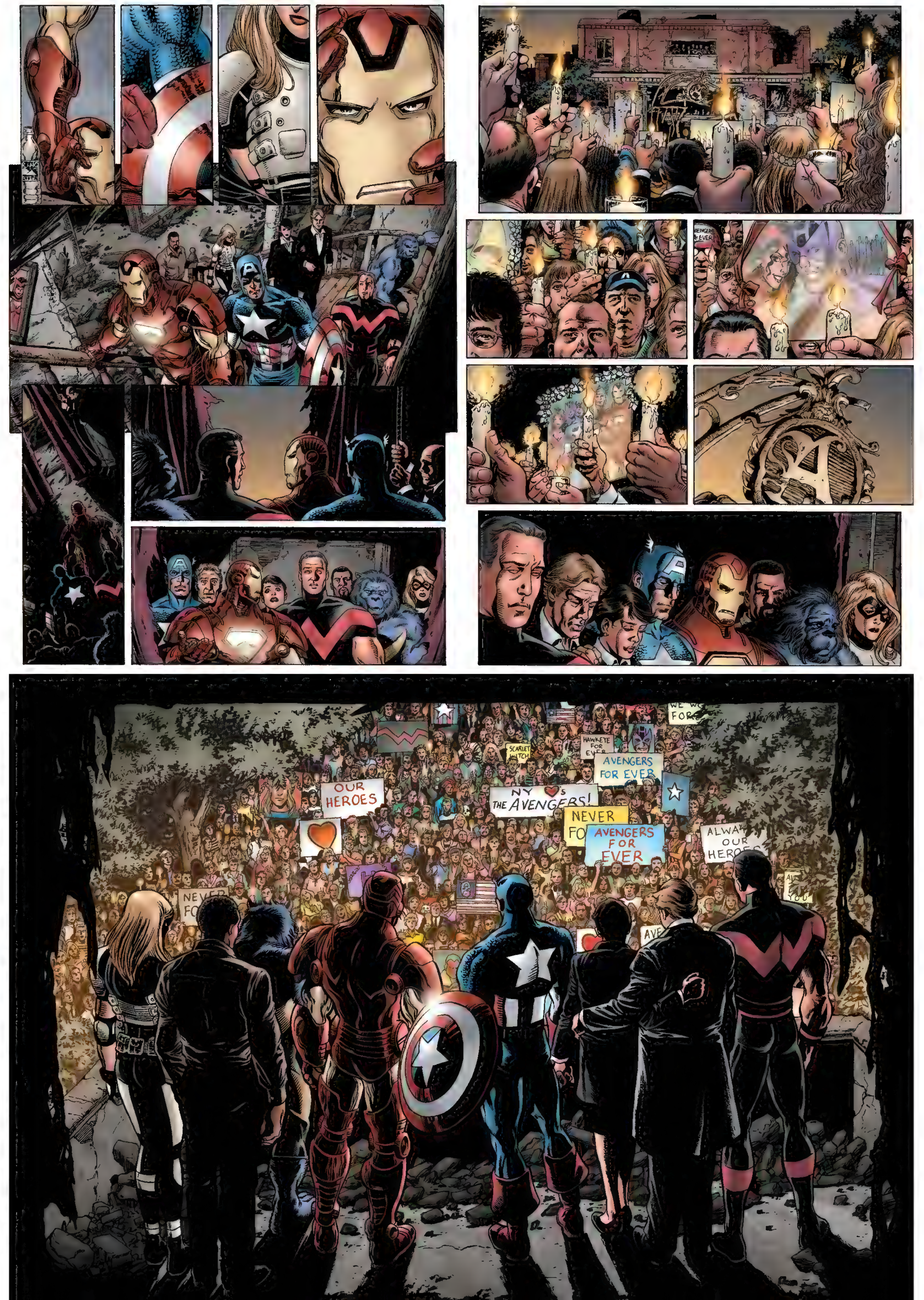




AS ONE OF THE BIGGEST-SELLING COMIC BOOKS OF THE LATE 1990S, AVENGERS RECEIVED MAJOR COVERAGE IN THE FAN PRESS, NOT LEAST IN *WIZARD*—AND, AS A RED-HOT ARTIST OF THE DAY, PÉREZ DREW MULTIPLE COVERS FOR THE MAGAZINE, INCLUDING THE *WIZARD AVENGERS SPECIAL* IN 1999



AS THE ERA THAT BUSIEK AND PÉREZ USHERED IN WAS BROUGHT TO A DRAMATIC CLOSE BY WRITER BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS WITH THE SHATTERING EVENTS OF "AVENGERS DISASSEMBLED," PÉREZ FITTINGLY RETURNED TO ILLUSTRATE THE POIGNANT CLOSING PAGES OF 2005'S *AVENGERS FINALE*





CHAPTER NINE

THE ULTIMATE CROSSOVER

“Before I ever became an artist, this was my dream.”

Since he first learned how to grip a pencil, Pérez just loved drawing his favorite comic book heroes. He didn’t know anything about copyright, he didn’t care which company’s logo was on the cover, he just drew. Captain America could battle Batman, the Avengers could assemble alongside the Justice League of America—and nothing made him happier.

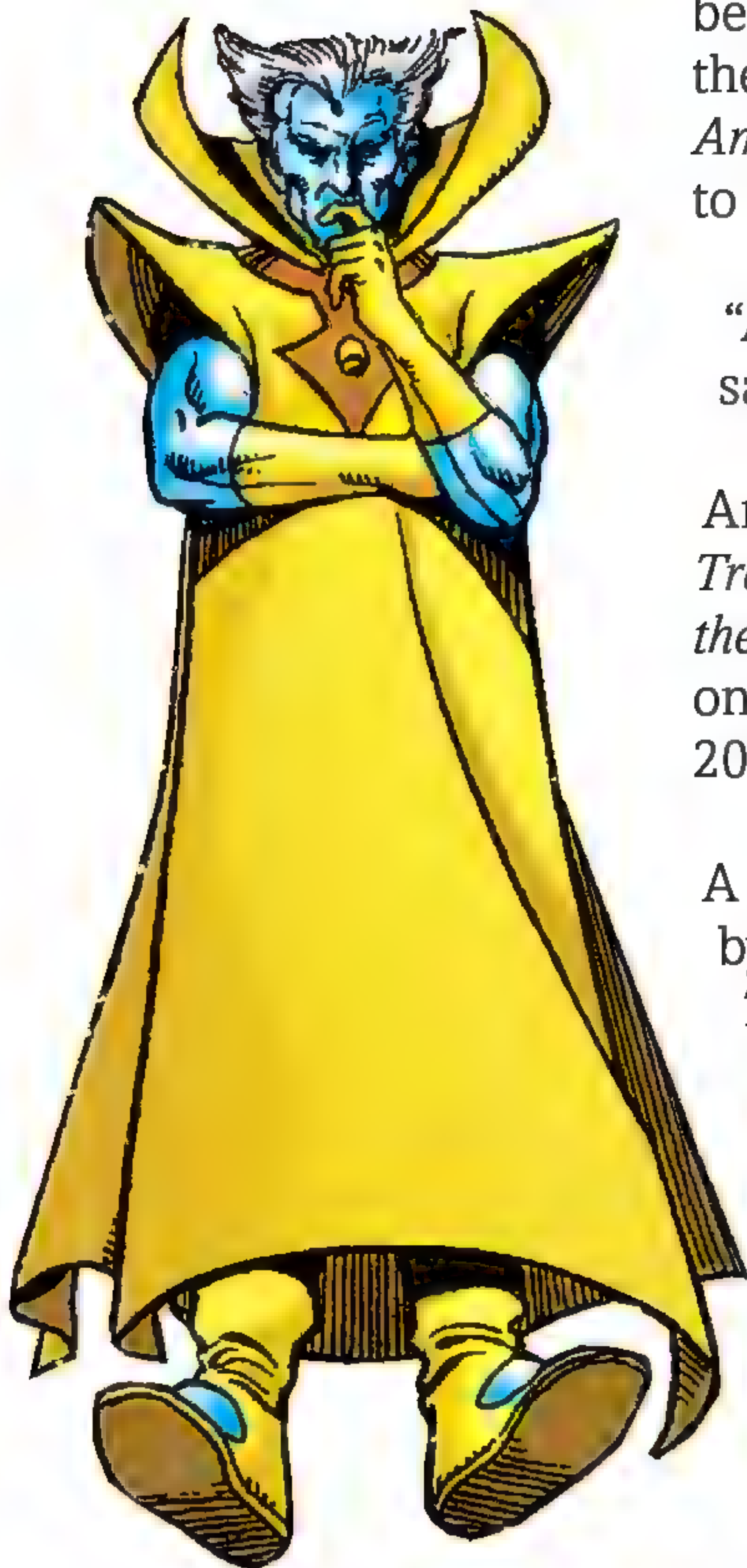
By the time he began working for Marvel, he was fully aware of the rivalry between the “House of Ideas” and its “Distinguished Competition”—but it wouldn’t be long before a glimmer of hope was raised that somehow, some day, he might be able to put the Avengers and the JLA together, for real. The pioneering special *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man* in 1976 made his ambition seem attainable—but still he had a lot to do to prove he was the man to draw it.

“After *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider Man*, I realized now it could be possible,” Pérez says, “but at the time I was not working at DC, I hadn’t worked on the JLA.”

Another five years passed before Marvel and DC joined forces again, for *Marvel Treasury Edition #28: Superman and Spider-Man* and *DC Special Series #27: Batman vs. the Incredible Hulk*—and by this time, Pérez had drawn *Justice League of America*. Not only that, but before his run was done, he could say he had worked on the landmark 200th issues of both *Avengers* and *JLA*.

A blockbuster union of the two most popular teams in comics did follow in 1982, but by this time the new kids on the block had upstaged the icons. *Marvel and DC Present The Uncanny X-Men* and *The New Teen Titans* would, logically, have been another perfect Pérez project—but it was Marvel’s turn to put the book together, and he was contracted to DC. As a result, Walt Simonson penciled the book.

Next though, in 1983, everything was set—the varsity heroes would finally meet, in one of the most hotly anticipated comic books of all time. It was on—and the Maestro was ready. “*JLA/Avengers*—who else but George Pérez?” as Pérez imagines the publishers’ recruitment process. “Or rather, who else could we hire other than Pérez that George wouldn’t put a contract on? It was definitely going to be mine!”





The book was announced, with Pérez drawing and Gerry Conway writing, though Roy Thomas was later brought on board to work on the script. Excitement built in the fan press, not least with the cover to *Comics Interview* #6, featuring almost 30 members of the Avengers and the Justice League squaring off as only Pérez could stage it.

The artist couldn't wait to get to work. "I had penciled 21 pages, I was happy with them," he says. "I didn't want to go to sleep—I just didn't want to leave the drawing board."

But then, his dreams were shattered. Behind the scenes, negotiations over the project stalled, and ultimately it reached the point that *JLA/Avengers* was dead. "I reacted very bitterly," Pérez admits. "I didn't get the full story. I was just drawing for the sake of drawing, no one told me not to and I was given the go-ahead, but there were a lot of disagreements and, eventually, personalities just killed it. It was one of those things that was an eye-opening experience and made me realize it is a business. There are



decisions that are being made not just because you want to draw super heroes and create comics and have fun. There are other things that are being considered that supersede that, so it was a slap of reality. It took me a while to get over that and accept that as the business of comics."

Fast forward seventeen years. After his successful stewardship of the creatively daring Marvel Knights line, Joe Quesada was made Editor in Chief of Marvel Comics—and he had a question for Tom Brevoort.

"Joe had an initiative that he wanted to pursue called 'unfinished business,'" Brevoort explains. "In essence, he wanted to look at any projects from the past that had somehow gone off the rails, to see if we could find some way to get them back on track. He asked me to walk him through the history of the original *JLA/Avengers* and why it didn't happen. After I gave him the rundown, he told me pretty much to go off and make it happen—so that's what I set out to do."

“If nothing else those original *JLA*/*Avengers* pages have a significant meaning in the history of comics. The first project obviously did not succeed, while the second one did—but both had an impact on the industry and how the companies play together.”

— GEORGE PÉREZ



Marvel and DC had in fact worked together multiple times during the boom-and-bust 1990s, as, in search of sales, the industry went wild with inter-company crossovers. Pérez himself had written *Silver Surfer/Superman*, while whole universes first went to war in the alternately titled four-issue series *DC vs. Marvel*/*Marvel vs. DC*, then were merged together in a series of specials featuring composite heroes under the banner of “Amalgam Comics.” But, if the big two could finally put the Justice League and the Avengers together and do it right, it would be something else entirely. Of course, doing it right meant only one thing: it had to be Pérez. Thankfully, as the book’s natural writer Kurt Busiek puts it: “Nobody wanted to do this project without George.”

Brevoort’s experience with earlier crossovers meant he was friendly with DC editor Mike Carlin, which helped to begin a dialogue. “It took everyone a while to agree to all of the terms and conditions,” Brevoort says, “but everybody involved on both sides was enthusiastic about the possibility of making a new version of this lost classic project finally happen, especially since *Avengers* and *JLA* were then two of the best-selling titles in the industry.”

However, the race to reach an agreement became more time-sensitive with the announcement that, having left *Avengers*, Pérez was signing a contract with a relatively new publisher, CrossGen, founded by Mark Alessi. The artist was attracted by the security offered by the position at a time when his health was an increasing concern.

“With CrossGen, you joined the staff,” Pérez says. “They were offering me employee perks like insurance. My wife was really gung ho about it. But at that same time, Tom and Joe and people at DC were starting to dangle the carrot of *JLA/Avengers*. I had been given hope before, but it was always snatched away. I had seen a lot of false starts and so I was not convinced—and my wife definitely was not. She really wanted the security. But I told Mark Alessi over at CrossGen: ‘If George Pérez is offered *JLA/Avengers*, he is not going to turn it down. I know him, that’s the book he wants.’ So that’s when Mark dared DC and Marvel, saying: ‘If you want George Pérez, you have got to give him a contract by this time or it’s a false start and he is going to work for us. That’s it.’”

PÉREZ’S PENCILLED PAGES OFFER A GLIMPSE AT WHAT A CLASSIC *JLA/AVENGERS* WOULD HAVE LOOKED LIKE BACK IN 1983





Even then, it went to the wire. “There was no paperwork until the very last day of the deadline, when I received a fax with a letter of agreement,” Pérez says. “Mark put me on as an employee of CrossGen and gave me a leave of absence so I could work on *JLA/Avengers*. I lost nothing on the deal and it was incredibly flattering to boot. I got to do that dream project.”

The book was announced to great fanfare at Orlando Megacon 2001, and Brevoort says that he stuck around in Florida an extra day to discuss the details with Busiek, Pérez, and DC’s *JLA* editor Dan Raspler. “That was pretty fun, with everybody jamming and

throwing their different ideas into the ring, which Kurt then went off and organized into a cohesive plot,” Brevoort remembers. “George was about the happiest man alive working on that series—he even decided that he would ink the whole thing himself, a titanic amount of work for him.”

It was a time of celebration for Pérez, less so for his wife. “Until the book was actually published, she had no faith. She was thinking about our future, about having a steady income—of lessening my workload. Here I was taking on a book that was doubling or tripling my workload.”



But, after such a long time, Pérez was determined to show that *JLA/Avengers* was “worth the wait.” He adds: “Like I do with everything, I had to work hard to prove it was worth it, because if I had said no, the book would have been dead. I was the one reason that book was going to be done. Joe said, we owe this to George. So I was going to see it through and do the best work I could. As good as I could draw back in 1983, I had twenty years of development time. I didn’t think I had to prove myself on the first *JLA/Avengers*. But with twenty years of anticipation, now it had expectations. Now I had something to prove. I gave myself the extra challenge of inking it myself—making it all mine, for better or worse.”

He was delighted to renew his *Avengers* collaboration with Busiek. “Kurt knew that no matter what he wrote, the one thing he didn’t have to ask was: which character do you want to draw?” Pérez says. “He found a way in a four-issue story to draw every single person who had ever been an Avenger and every single person who had ever been a member of the JLA, plus other members of the Marvel and DC universes in there as well. And he made it go through time and space so I could draw different versions of all the characters. I could draw early Avengers, I could draw current Avengers—it was *fun*.”

For his part, Busiek also wanted to do justice to this landmark meeting of the two greatest super-teams of all, by confounding expectations. “Traditionally, the way these stories are done is you pick one villain from one universe, one villain from the other universe, and you match the heroes up and have them work together but hate each other,” Busiek explains. “And the heroes fight, but it comes to a draw. So everybody looks good and then they work together and there’s a formula to it. And it’s not that it’s a bad formula—we used a lot of that formula—it’s just that I wanted to do something more. Something that has more weight. I wanted to say, the DC Universe and the Marvel Universe feel different. Marvel has a long tradition from the Silver Age of being the world of the scrappy heroes that don’t get appreciated by the public. And DC has a long tradition from the Silver Age and before of the heroes being treated almost like gods. And I said, what if we pushed it further than that? What if the worlds are literally different? What if gravity isn’t quite the same? What if the physical laws are different? That’s where we leaned into things like the Scarlet Witch channels chaos magic, but chaos magic is a really big, scary thing in the DC Universe. We’ve got the Infinity Gauntlet—what if it’s in the DC Universe and it just doesn’t work? How about we have characters in Metropolis travel to the Marvel Universe and they’re where Metropolis is, but it’s just kind of sandy Delaware beach. Building that was part of the fun of it. And George was determined to get all the Wasp costumes into the story somehow...”

The four-issue, premium format series was published in 2003, Marvel printing #1 and #3 as *JLA/Avengers*, and DC handling #2 and #4 as *Avengers/JLA*. And Pérez’s excitement



to be drawing this momentous story at last, with all its hundreds of heroes, is evident on every single page—and every wraparound cover. Unforgettable images include the Avengers facing the Justice League's gigantic alien foe Starro...a beautifully choreographed sequence featuring Captain America and Batman...the awesome sight of Eternity and Kismet, physical embodiments of their respective universes, locked in an embrace...and even an homage to Pérez's timeless *Comics Interview* #6 cover, as Busiek cleverly worked the plot of the original crossover into the narrative of the new one.

But one defining moment stands out. An instantly iconic illustration that captured the full majesty of this historic series. What could be more perfect than Superman holding both Captain America's shield and Thor's hammer, Mjolnir?

"When we knew *JLA/Avengers* was green lit, that was the first image we came up with without even a word of plot," Pérez says of the idea that became the cover for #4. "One of the great things about that cover is that, without context, it could mean that Superman is using Cap and Thor's own weapons against them. Or, he could be the last man standing. It was a great scene and everyone from Marvel and DC conceded that Superman is the iconic character. Without him there would be no super hero industry so, yes, that was the first image of *JLA/Avengers* that we knew had to be done."

"Seeing DC's greatest hero and Marvel's greatest weapons together didn't feel like a DC image or a Marvel image," Busiek says. "It's the two together. It blends them in a way that's different from having two characters stand side-to-side. It was just such a powerful image—and kind of a shocking image to see Superman with those weapons."

If the artist's cover for #4 was jaw-dropping, what he produced for #3 was mind-boggling—perhaps the single most Pérez drawing of all-time.



“In the first version of *JLA/Avengers* I had drawn an actual Batman/Captain America fight that was interrupted when Batman cheated and threw a gas grenade. Here, we had two men who were the best physical specimens possible. One is a soldier and one is a street fighter. You don’t want either one of them to beat the other one in a fair fight, so we came up with that idea of them just feeling each other out. I added the rain, inspired by the last scene in the movie *Lethal Weapon*. The rain provides energy and movement in a scene that has almost none. Keeping them in shadow was another thing to keep the tension going. This was a really, really great moment. As good a pair of physical fighters as they are, Captain America and Batman are also smart men—I think Kurt and I did a beautiful job capturing that.” — **GEORGE PÉREZ**



“*JLA/Avengers* is maybe the finest art job that George ever produced, especially when you consider the sheer number of characters involved and how complex the two universes are.”

— TOM BREVOORT

Only he would even attempt to fit every single Avenger and Justice Leaguer on a single art board—even if it was an oversized one.

“That cover was a lot of work even before George started on it,” Busiek says, “because we had to give him the list of who will be on it so that he could check them off as he drew them, which meant that Tom and I had to figure out who had been an Avenger and who had been a Justice Leaguer and DC had to improve the Justice League list. It was a huge amount of research. But then George had to pack all that research into one drawing—and it almost killed him.”

At his own agent’s request, because of the obvious marketability of the piece, Pérez used an art board so huge that it didn’t fit on his drawing table—incredibly, he pinned it to the wall and drew the cover standing up. But undertaking this Herculean task at such a clumsy angle put strain on his forearm, causing him excruciating tendonitis that would trouble him for years. “I was afraid I would snap it,” Pérez says. “It meant I couldn’t bend my hand for a while. I got a carpal glove to minimize the stress on my hand, I took some time off and started working again with the carpal glove on. I felt bad, because it slowed me down and the fourth issue ended up being late, but Tom Brevoort told me, don’t feel bad about the fourth issue coming in late—you got three issues in on time.”



Despite the pain, Pérez was determined to complete this, his defining project—and that meant refusing all offers of a relief inker. “I needed to recover but I still would not give up the inking,” he says. “I said, every line of that book has to be mine. I need to finish it—and I did. It was a crowning achievement.”

He had waited a long time—a lifetime—but his dream had finally come true. And, on reflection, as bitter as the loss had been in 1983, being able to draw *JLA/Avengers* at the peak of his powers, with Busiek and the “great” Tom Smith as colorist once again at his side, and all the advances in paper quality and production that the ensuing decades had produced, made this a “worthy resurrection.”

His only regrets are that the series wasn’t a little longer, and that it has fallen out of print in the years since. “I remember, I think it might have been Joe who said the degree of success would be that it would be in print forever,” he says. Alas, though *JLA/Avengers* was critically acclaimed and a huge seller, it proved to be the last crossover project between the publishers. The collected editions that were published—a 2004 hardcover Collector’s Edition, including a Compendium featuring the 21 penciled pages from the original abandoned series, and a 2008 trade paperback—have become highly sought-after by fans.

But this minor disappointment takes nothing away from his understandable pride at achieving an ambition that drove him for so long—at finally hunting down his own personal great white whale.

“*JLA / Avengers*, that is what I got into the industry for,” he says, his face lighting up with excitement. “All the little cartoons, all the doodles I used to draw as a kid, with the characters from different companies going together—who would win in this fight and such and such—I got to do. *JLA / Avengers* was a story that fulfilled every fanboy’s dream. It was the pinnacle of my comic book success.”







SUPERMAN FELT THE FULL FORCE OF MJOLNIR ON THE JUSTICE LEAGUE'S FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE AVENGERS, BUT ENDED UP WIELDING BOTH THE MIGHTY HAMMER AND CAPTAIN AMERICA'S SHIELD DURING THE CLIMACTIC BATTLE.









CHAPTER TEN

THE PÉREZ LEGACY

“It was better to leave while everyone was asking for more.”

After *JLA/Avengers*, George Pérez never again drew a major project featuring Marvel characters, though his occasional credits for the publisher included the five-page, era-ending coda in 2005’s *Avengers Finale*. He did enjoy further success at DC, including a collaboration with Mark Waid on *The Brave and the Bold*, contributions to *Infinite Crisis* and *Final Crisis*—successors to his seminal 1980s event book *Crisis on Infinite Earths*—and writing *Superman* for the so-called “New 52” era. He also completed another long-awaited project, a reunion with Marv Wolfman on the *New Teen Titans: Games* graphic novel. In addition, Pérez created his very own super-team of powerful women, *Sirens*, published by BOOM! Studios.

But, over the years, his health worsened. The diabetes he had lived with since he was a relatively young man began to affect his eyes—a devastating condition for an artist.

“Unfortunately, I started having difficulty looking at things,” Pérez says. “I had developed diabetic retinopathy—distortion of my viewing. The first real serious problem was when I signed up with BOOM! and my left eye hemorrhaged on my way to a convention. I just started seeing streaks of dark red in front of my eye. It was operated on and the doctor did a wonderful job—that is now my better eye. During the course of time, I had cataract surgery and then my right eye developed glaucoma, so to all intents and purposes I am pretty much blind in that eye.”

Then, in 2017, he suffered a heart attack. “I realized my body was telling me that I had to start taking better care of myself,” he adds. “It was becoming more and more difficult to get the work done and try to put in the detail. I started to rely a bit more on Photoshop for fixing up and final rendering. This doubled or tripled the amount of time I was spending producing, and it became quite evident I could never maintain a monthly title.”

And so, in January 2019, Pérez took the momentous decision to retire from drawing comic books professionally, at the age of 64. He was still fielding offers from Marvel, DC, and more—as he puts it, “turning down all suitors like the popular





girl at the dance”—but, no longer feeling able to live up to his own high standards, he knew it was time.

He made his announcement without a hint of bitterness at a career cut short, only tremendous gratitude at having been able to do what he loved for so long. As he put it then: “I’ve had a wonderfully good run doing exactly what I have wanted to do since I was a child. Now I can sit back and watch the stuff I helped create entertain whole new generations. That’s a pretty nice legacy to look back on.”

That legacy is a profound and far-reaching one. It can be measured first in his work—which is constantly being collected in trade paperbacks and lavish hardcovers, the likes of which he admits would have been “unimaginable” when he started out in the industry.

“The fact that they can reprint the same stories in different formats and still sell them, I am just amazed by,” he says. “They reprinted ‘Man-Wolf,’ they reprinted ‘Sons of the Tiger.’ I used to tell my wife, I’ve got to keep doing this before they start forgetting who I am. She would say, ‘They are not going to forget who you are.’ And the fact that they think my name and my artwork still have that value is very flattering. It gives you a sense of immortality. I seem to be in a position where I doubt I am going to be forgotten anytime soon.”

Even in retirement, Pérez’s bibliography continues to expand. In 2019, Marvel’s 80th anniversary, he found the time to draw one last page for the celebratory issue, *Marvel Comics #1000*—fittingly featuring his first major co-creation, the White Tiger, and the modern-day inheritors of that heroic mantle. To look at it, you would swear it was drawn by an artist with perfect 20/20 vision. In addition, a number of lesser-known Pérez pieces have been hauled from the archives and remastered for a series of “Hidden Gem” variant covers, starring Spider-Man, the X-Men, the Fantastic Four and, on the very cover to this volume, the Avengers. Beyond that, certain commissioned drawings continue to be used on other Pérez variants—including his signature characters like Thanos, the Maestro, and Hellcat, and others he is less associated with, including Storm, Wolverine, and even Conan the Barbarian. Pérez completists cannot join him in retirement yet.

Beyond the printed page, his impact can be gauged in how his stories have shaped the characters he worked on, and their representations in other media. “In the case of Marvel, my work with Kurt Busiek made the Avengers a viable product again,” he says proudly. “You wouldn’t have the *Avengers* movie—or be inspired to do that particular *Avengers* movie—if it hadn’t have been for our returning the Avengers to their proper glory. I did the same with books at DC. I was grateful that, thanks to the work I did for both companies, and because of all the movies and the commercial tie-ins, video games, etc., I was earning more money in royalties than I ever was working, so I could afford to retire before I became an object of pity. I didn’t need to prove myself anymore, I can enjoy the rest of my life.”

Pérez knows how unusual it is for a comic book artist, even one of his stature, to be able to voluntarily retire. “If this was going to happen to any artist, I am glad it happened to me,” he says of his condition. “I would hate to think how for another artist, who has to work in order to pay their bills and meet the everyday expenses of life, this would have been a fatal blow. I am well aware how lucky I am. The industry has been very kind and generous to me. I have no reason to look back with any kind of resentment or regret. I have ended up luckier than a lot.”

Pérez’s legacy can be assessed by reference to the many awards he has won throughout his career, most notably his induction into the Eisner Awards Hall of Fame in 2017. But it also extends to the indelible impact he has made on those he has worked with, and the countless creators who have been inspired by his art—only a handful of which we have room to feature accolades from here.

Kurt Busiek sums up Pérez’s career as one of constant self-improvement. “George is always looking for ways to do it better, to do it cooler, to catch readers and pull them in, as if he’s that 18-year-old guy who was looking for his first break,” Busiek says. “I think that’s why George’s career is such a parade of successes. He never said, OK, good enough.”

Mark Waid affectionately describes Pérez as “a madman...a nut,” elaborating: “Ask for four panels, he’ll give you nine. Ask for five heroes, he’ll give you seventeen. For a guy who draws some of the best, most realistic-looking rubble and machinery in comics, it’s uncanny how George’s work radiates humanity with every hero’s smile or head nod, with every villain’s malefic glare or leer. The people George draws are real. George’s legacy will be as a superb storyteller, a generous collaborator, and a hell of a sweet guy.”



Reciprocating Pérez's own praise of him, Marv Wolfman adds: "George was probably the very best all-around collaborator I've ever worked with. He made every character come alive. He made every character unique. He made everything he worked on better. When other artists look at George's work they're all blown away by his attention to every detail he draws. His love for art is so obvious in everything. I believe, since that love shines through, it inspires other artists to work just as hard as they develop their own style. George is not only a great collaborator but also someone who became a great friend."

For Tom Brevoort, who has written extensively on Pérez's influence on him as a young comic book fan, he is "one of the finest super hero illustrators to ever work in the medium."

Brevoort says: "George was one of the best when it came to depicting both complicated, crowded battle sequences and smaller, more nuanced character moments. He combined the power of Jack Kirby with the design sensibility of Barry Windsor-Smith and the emotional subtlety of Curt Swan, fusing these elements into a cohesive style of his own, one which continued to evolve and grow as he moved from issue to issue. And he got better, with every job, with every new assignment. As he developed, he expanded his range to create characters of all shapes and sizes to better reflect the diversity of humanity he saw in the world around him. His storytelling became expert, and he mastered the ability to break a scene or a sequence down into a number of individual beats—even if that meant packing a page with several panels. He never skimped. And nobody loved drawing super heroes more than George Pérez—he would bring a child's enthusiasm to the work he did, constantly striving to draw bigger, better, more."

And acclaimed painter Alex Ross hails Pérez as one of the primary influences on his own artistic development. "The very first comic I have of his was *Avengers #149*, from 1976," Ross says. "Then I became an avid follower. George was the first artist I became obsessive about. I probably wasn't noticing as much, stylistically, his storytelling qualities and layout style until a little later, but, subconsciously, I was getting it when I was, like, 6 years old. I think it took until 1980 for the individuality of his style to dawn on me in a big, big way, and when that started to sink in with me, I would try to imitate it. But at first, it was really the figure drawing—there was something about it that was so charming, the shape of the forms. He didn't use a heavy amount of shadow, so, in a way, I was seeing the human form laid bare. And, of course, these were quite beautiful drawings of people. I found everything he did to be, in a way, the most appealing version of things. I've said somewhat the same thing about John Romita, that whenever John did artwork that featured the whole Marvel Universe, it would often feel like the most perfect illustration of those characters. George is right in line with that—but his stuff had that slight touch of saying, OK, we're moving into the future."

Subtle touches including the incorporation of more modern fashion trends gave Pérez's drawings that contemporary feeling, Ross believes. "When he would draw Captain America, he would really draw that boot cuff to hang like it was a pair of bellbottoms—and I loved that. There was something about that that was so grounded and



felt natural. You could imagine the guy walking in the room with that boot cuff. And there was a heaviness to the form of Captain America that seemed very impressive and majestic. And obviously, there were the women. His way of drawing women was at that time the sexiest that I found in comics, in terms of the rounded, voluptuous shape he incorporated in his work. With George, any way that he drew something, it was distinctive. It was never just that character as you always knew them—now it was through the George prism. And that was a beautiful prism.”

It wasn’t just the heroes on the page that inspired Ross, but the man behind them. “I wonder if the thing that made the biggest impression on me with George’s work at a young age would be somewhat subconscious,” Ross adds, “that everything he did was with drive and passion, that he wasn’t just doing a job. He was pushing forth such a phenomenal effort of delineation, adding everything plus the kitchen sink into every layout. He was not just willing but ambitious to add more, to rise to every single challenge. And one of the things that would affect me the most was that he wanted to draw everything and everyone. He wanted to hit every comics icon of history and have drawn them at least once—very often in one illustration. That set a challenge or instilled a desire in me, as a teenager, that would carry on through my adult career. That idea that, if you get a chance to illustrate something, it may be just one chance—so make that chance sing.”

For Ross, it “goes without saying” that Pérez was one of the most influential artists of his generation. “It’s inarguable that there are no two bigger artists for the period of the 1980s, and a lot of the surrounding years around them, than John Byrne and George Pérez. They were the center point of changing the way that the art form was viewed, and their passion ignited so much of a fire among fans like me and countless others.”



Beyond these creators—and many, many more—Pérez’s influence extends to his legions of fans across the globe, for whom he has become an avuncular figure throughout his career. He has always loved meeting them, even developing close relationships with them, at conventions, and in particular seeing cosplayers re-create his signature characters. Even in retirement, he tries to do a couple of shows a year, with Atlanta’s Dragon Con a personal favorite.

“I like to mingle with the fans,” Pérez says. “I get to see them playing out all the fantasies that I helped create—to me that is incredibly gratifying as a creator and as a fan myself. When they come to my table, I like each fan to know at that point they are the only person in front of me. I want you to feel important, because you are. I would have no career if it wasn’t for you. I actually refuse to have a table between us. I go to the other side and put my arm around the fan and have us photographed together. Many of them I know by name, they call me ‘Uncle George’ and, when I had my birthday recently, my niece went out on social media requesting people to send birthday greetings to me. She was in tears at the amount of loving response she got from people who sent videos of how important I was in their lives. Some who I have known since they were practically toddlers and who now are adults remember how much I paid attention to them when they were children. That is a great feeling.”

Inevitably, Pérez has been asked thousands of times what it takes to be a comic book artist. His advice? “First and foremost, you should understand you have to be able to draw,” he says. “Obviously work on that. But one of the things that is distinct about comics is storytelling. You have to know how to tell a story visually, then you become valuable. I have seen a lot of artists who may not be the most technically proficient—and that includes me, when I started—who managed to get a foothold in the industry

because we knew how to tell a story. You also need to know that you need a great relationship with your writer. It is an archaic reference to a lot of fans, but I compare it to doing a silent movie—you have to provide so much information without dialogue. The second that title card in a silent movie, or a word balloon in a comic book, has to explain what is going on, then you have not done your job. The other thing I tell all the young people who want to be artists is don't do it for the money. You are an artist because you can't imagine yourself *not* being an artist. Work for the satisfaction, do it for the expression, do it for the entertainment. If you are trying to be a storyteller and if you do it well and luck is on your side, the money will come. I wanted to draw because it's who I am, it's what I do. To be able to say that, for over four and a half decades I got to do exactly what I wanted to do, I was incredibly lucky."

His gregarious attitude to the comic-buying public won him the praise of no less than Stan Lee. "One of the things that Stan always loved about me was my rapport with the fans," Pérez says. "That is the thing that Stan was the champion of, what he started. Stan paid me the compliment of saying, 'you are like my nephew, you are exactly what I want the fans to see.' The comics industry got me out of what could have been a tragic life in the ghettos and gang-infested South Bronx. It gave me what I never expected to have—an influence. I have inspired and influenced and actually made a difference."

Pérez continues to make a difference. He plays an active role with the Hero Initiative, the charity that helps comic book creators in need. He still takes on private commissions—his sketches remain in very high demand—but devotes all the proceeds to charitable causes including children's hospitals and veteran's groups, or to family and friends in need, particularly those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. When the crisis is over, he looks forward to resuming traveling with his wife, but he enjoys dining out with her and spending time with her at their Florida home. Despite his eyesight issues, he is still an avid crossword solver, trying to complete a couple of puzzles a day. So far, retirement has been treating him very well—even in the "new normal" of 2020 and 2021.

"In the long run I am with the woman I love, I have a nice home, I can still draw and I can still help people," he says. "It can be a lot worse."

The Pérez legacy is a rich one indeed—but despite all that he has achieved, the man himself remains very humble, and very grateful.

"Marvel and DC have both been incredibly good to me," Pérez says. "They have never shown me anything less than respect for all that I have done for them. The fact that Marvel wanted to do this book—my wife was so tickled when she heard about it. I often joke that, with all the wonderful accolades and tributes made about my impact on the industry, the only thing missing for me is being in a box. It is like listening to the words at my own funeral. The fact that this is a tribute book and not a memorial is nice to know."

Indeed it is—and long may Pérez's richly deserved retirement last. Longevity runs in his family—his parents are both 89 years old, while he, at time of writing, is just 66. That's plenty of time to fill—so who knows what the future holds? "What am I gonna do for 23 years?" he asks. "That's a long time. That's a full trip to adulthood and then some. I have to take care of myself—that will be the challenge. And, when the idea of retirement starts losing its novelty, I wonder how antsy I'll become. I may have to call up Marvel and DC and say, is there something you have...with a very, very loose deadline?"

Could the Maestro really return, like a legendary rock star on one last tour?

George replies, with a twinkle in his eye: "Never say never."



"I take great pleasure that, for my last page of storytelling artwork for Marvel, I got to draw the White Tiger again. What a nice bit of closure. Who woulda thunk I'd be drawing the White Tiger again after 45 years?"

— GEORGE
PÉREZ



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8: *MARVEL PREMIERE* (1972) #45 COVER — INKS BY BOB MCLEOD
9: *DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU* (1974) #20 — INKS BY JACK ABEL
10: *ASTONISHING TALES* (1970) #25 — WORDS BY DOUG MOENCH; INKS BY MIKE ESPOSITO (DEATHLOK DRAWN BY RICH BUCKLER)
11: *MONSTERS UNLEASHED* (1974) #8 — WORDS BY TONY ISABELLA AND DOUG MOENCH; INKS BY RICH BUCKLER/DUFFY VOHLAND
12: *POWER MAN* (1974) #27 — WORDS BY BILL MANTLO; INKS BY ALDEN MCWILLIAMS
UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION (1975) #2 — WORDS BY TONY ISABELLA; INKS BY RICO RIVAL
13: *MARVEL PREVIEW* (1980) #20 INSIDE COVER
14: *DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU* (1974) #7 — WORDS BY BILL MANTLO; INKS BY BOB MCLEOD
15: *DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU* (1974) #12 — WORDS BY BILL MANTLO
DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU (1974) #13 — WORDS BY BILL MANTLO; INKS BY JACK ABEL
16-18: *DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU* (1974) #19 — WORDS BY BILL MANTLO; INKS BY JACK ABEL
19: *DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU* (1974) #20 — WORDS BY BILL MANTLO; INKS BY JACK ABEL
20-21: *DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU* (1974) #21 — WORDS BY BILL MANTLO; INKS BY JACK ABEL
22: *CREATURES ON THE LOOSE* (1971) #33 — WORDS BY DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT AND TONY ISABELLA; INKS BY KLAUS JANSON; COLORS BY PETRA GOLDBERG
23: *CREATURES ON THE LOOSE* (1971) #36 — WORDS BY DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT; INKS BY FRANK MCLAUGHLIN; COLORS BY PETRA GOLDBERG
24-25: *MARVEL PREMIERE* (1972) #45 — WORDS BY DAVID KRAFT AND TONY ISABELLA; INKS BY FRANK GIACOIA; COLORS BY CARL GAFFORD
26: *FANTASTIC FOUR VISIONARIES: GEORGE PÉREZ VOL 1 TPB* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
27: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #192 COVER — INKS BY FRANK GIACOIA
28-29: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #164 AND #165 — WORDS BY ROY THOMAS AND BILL MANTLO; INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY PETRA GOLDBERG
FANTASTIC FOUR LOGO HEADS; DEBUTED ON *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #190 COVER
30: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #172 — WORDS BY ROY THOMAS; INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY PETRA GOLDBERG
FANTASTIC FOUR (1961) #166 — WORDS BY ROY THOMAS; INKS BY VINCE COLLETTA; COLORS BY PHIL RACHELSON
31-33: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #172 — WORDS BY ROY THOMAS; INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY PETRA GOLDBERG
34: *INHUMANS* (1975) #2 — INKS BY FRED KIDA; COLORS BY JANICE COHEN
INHUMANS (1975) #1 — WORDS BY DOUG MOENCH; INKS BY FRANK CHIARAMONTE; COLORS BY DIANE BUSCEMA

35: *INHUMANS* (1975) #3 — WORDS BY DOUG MOENCH; INKS BY MIKE ESPOSITO; COLORS BY PETRA GOLDBERG
36-37: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #176 — WORDS BY ROY THOMAS; INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY MICHELE WOLFMAN
38: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #176 — WORDS BY ROY THOMAS; INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY MICHELE WOLFMAN
FANTASTIC FOUR (1961) #177 — WORDS BY ROY THOMAS; INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY MARIE SEVERIN
39: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #183 COVER — INKS BY JOE SINNOTT
40-41: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #186 COVER — INKS BY JOE SINNOTT
FANTASTIC FOUR (1961) #186 — WORDS BY LEN WEIN; INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY GLYNIS OLIVER
FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL (1963) #14 — WORDS BY MARV WOLFMAN; INKS BY PABLO MARCOS; COLORS BY CARL GAFFORD
42: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #187 — WORDS BY LEN WEIN; INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY GLYNIS OLIVER
43: *FANTASTIC FOUR* (1961) #191 COVER — INKS BY JOE SINNOTT
44: *FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL* (1963) #14 (TOP) — WORDS BY MARV WOLFMAN; INKS BY PABLO MARCOS; COLORS BY CARL GAFFORD
FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL (1963) #15 — WORDS BY DOUG MOENCH; INKS BY JON D'AGOSTINO/MIKE ESPOSITO/CHARLES STONE; COLORS BY GEORGE ROUSSOS/BEN SEAN
45: *FANTASTIC FOUR VISIONARIES: GEORGE PÉREZ VOL 2 TPB* COVER
46: *AVENGERS EPIC COLLECTION: THE FINAL THREAT TPB* COVER — REMASTERED FROM *AVENGERS* (1963) #150 COVER
47: *AVENGERS* (1963) #161 — INKS BY PABLO MARCOS; COLORS BY JIM SHOOTER
48: *AVENGERS* (1963) #142 — WORDS BY STEVE ENGLEHART; INKS BY VINCE COLLETTA; COLORS BY JANICE COHEN
AVENGERS (1963) #143 — WORDS BY STEVE ENGLEHART; INKS BY SAM GRAINGER; COLORS BY GEORGE ROUSSOS
49: *AVENGERS* (1963) #144 — WORDS BY STEVE ENGLEHART; INKS BY MIKE ESPOSITO; COLORS BY PETRA GOLDBERG
50-51: *AVENGERS* (1963) #148 (LEFT AND RIGHT) — WORDS BY STEVE ENGLEHART; INKS BY SAM GRAINGER; COLORS BY HUGH PALEY
AVENGERS (1963) #147 (MIDDLE) — WORDS BY STEVE ENGLEHART; INKS BY VINCE COLLETTA; COLORS BY PETRA GOLDBERG
52-53: *AVENGERS* (1963) #151 — WORDS BY GERRY CONWAY, JIM SHOOTER AND STEVE ENGLEHART; INKS BY JOHN TARTAGLIONE; COLORS BY DON WARFIELD
AVENGERS (1963) #155 (BOTTOM RIGHT) — WORDS BY GERRY CONWAY; INKS BY PABLO MARCOS; COLORS BY GLYNIS OLIVER
54-55: *AVENGERS* (1963) #160 — WORDS BY JIM SHOOTER; INKS BY PABLO MARCOS; COLORS BY DENISE WOHL
56: *AVENGERS* (1963) #161 COVER — INKS BY PABLO MARCOS
57: *AVENGERS* (1963) #167 COVER — INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN
AVENGERS (1963) #167 — WORDS BY JIM SHOOTER; INKS BY PABLO MARCOS; COLORS BY PHIL RACHELSON
58-59: *AVENGERS* (1963) #167 AND #168 — WORDS BY JIM SHOOTER; INKS BY PABLO MARCOS; COLORS BY PHIL RACHELSON
60-61: *AVENGERS LEGENDS VOL 2: THE KORVAC SAGA TPB* COVERS — COLORS BY AVALON STUDIOS' DAVE KEMP; REMASTERED FROM THE FRONT AND BACK COVERS OF *AVENGERS: THE KORVAC SAGA TPB*
62-63: *AVENGERS* (1963) #172, #185 AND #181 COVERS — INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN
64: *AVENGERS: MARVEL SNAPSHOTS* COVER — INKS BY JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY MORRY HOLLOWELL; REMASTERED FROM *AVENGERS* (1963) #178 UNUSED COVER ART
AVENGERS (1963) #194 — WORDS BY DAVID MICHELINIE; INKS BY JOSEF RUBINSTEIN; COLORS BY BEN SEAN
AVENGERS (1963) #198 — INKS BY DAN GREEN; COLORS BY CARL GAFFORD/BEN SEAN
65: *MARVEL ILLUSTRATED: THE SWIMSUIT ISSUE #1* (1991)
66: *AVENGERS* (1963) #194 — INKS BY JOSEF RUBINSTEIN; COLORS BY BEN SEAN

AVENGERS (1963) #196 COVER — INKS BY JOSEF RUBINSTEIN
67: *AVENGERS* (1963) #201 COVER — INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN
68: *MARVEL COMICS CALENDAR 1980: THE OCCULT WORLD OF DOCTOR STRANGE* — INKS BY BOB WIACEK
69: *MARVEL COMICS 20TH ANNIVERSARY CALENDAR 1981* — INKS BY GENE DAY
70: *AVENGERS* (1963) #200 COVER — INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN
OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE MASTER EDITION (1991) #19
71: *AVENGERS VISIONARIES: GEORGE PÉREZ TPB* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
72: *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* (1974) #50 COVER — INKS BY JOE SINNOTT
73: *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* (1974) #58 COVER — INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN
74: *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* (1974) #63 AND #66 COVERS — INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN
75: *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* (1974) #51 COVER — INKS BY JOE SINNOTT
76: *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* (1974) #54 COVER — INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE (1974) #56 — WORDS BY MARK GRUENWALD AND RALPH MACCHIO; INKS BY GENE DAY; COLORS BY BOB SHAREN
77: *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* (1974) #58 — WORDS BY MARK GRUENWALD AND RALPH MACCHIO; INKS BY GENE DAY; COLORS BY CARL GAFFORD
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE (1974) #64 (RIGHT) — WORDS BY MARK GRUENWALD AND RALPH MACCHIO; INKS BY GENE DAY; COLORS BY CARL GAFFORD/BEN SEAN
78-79: *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE* (1974) #60 — WORDS BY MARK GRUENWALD AND RALPH MACCHIO; INKS BY GENE DAY; COLORS BY ROGER SLIFER
80: *DEFENDERS* (1972) #51 COVER — INKS BY PABLO MARCOS
GHOST RIDER (1973) #26 COVER
IRON MAN (1968) #102 COVER — INKS BY PABLO MARCOS
MS. MARVEL (1977) #23 COVER
81: *SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN* (1976) #10 COVER — INKS BY FRANK GIACOIA
82-83: *FOOM* (1973) #19 COVER
84: *THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN MIGHTY MARVEL COMICS CALENDAR 1978* — INKS BY PABLO MARCOS
85: *MARVEL TEAM-UP* (1972) #65 COVER — INKS BY JOE SINNOTT
86: *THE INCREDIBLE HULK MIGHTY MARVEL COMICS CALENDAR 1979*
87: *X-MEN* (1963) #112 COVER — INKS BY BOB LAYTON
X-MEN (1963) #128 COVER — INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN
88-89: *X-MEN ANNUAL* (1970) #3 — WORDS BY CHRIS CLAREMONT; INKS BY TERRY AUSTIN; COLORS BY GLYNIS WEIN
90-91: *BIZARRE ADVENTURES* (1981) #27 — WORDS BY JO DUFFY; INKS BY ALFREDO ALCALA
92: *MARVEL FANFARE* (1982) #10 COVER
93: *MARVEL FANFARE* (1982) #11 COVER — INKS BY BOB LAYTON
94-95: *MARVEL FANFARE* (1982) #10 — WORDS BY GEORGE PÉREZ AND RALPH MACCHIO; INKS BY BRETT BREEDING; COLORS BY PETRA SCOTese
96-97: *MARVEL FANFARE* (1982) #11 COVER — INKS BY BOB LAYTON
MARVEL FANFARE (1982) #11 — WORDS BY GEORGE PÉREZ AND RALPH MACCHIO; INKS BY JACK ABEL/JOE SINNOTT; COLORS BY BEN SEAN
98-99: *MARVEL FANFARE* (1982) #12 — WORDS BY GEORGE PÉREZ AND RALPH MACCHIO; INKS BY AL MILGROM; COLORS BY BOB SHAREN
100: *INFINITY GAUNTLET* (1991) #1 COVER
101: *INFINITY GAUNTLET* (1991) #4 COVER
102-107: *INFINITY GAUNTLET* (1991) #1 — WORDS BY JIM STARLIN; INKS BY TOM CHRISTOPHER/JOSEF RUBINSTEIN; COLORS BY IAN LAUGHLIN/CHRISTIE SCHEELE
108: *INFINITY GAUNTLET* (1991) #2 COVER
109: *INFINITY GAUNTLET* (1991) #2 — WORDS BY JIM STARLIN; INKS BY JOSEF RUBINSTEIN; COLORS BY CHRISTIE SCHEELE

110-111: *INFINITY GAUNTLET (1991) #3* COVER
112-113: *INFINITY GAUNTLET (1991) #3* — WORDS BY JIM STARLIN; INKS BY JOSEF RUBINSTEIN; COLORS BY IAN LAUGHLIN/CHRISTIE SCHEELE
114: *INCREDIBLE HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT #1* — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
115: *INCREDIBLE HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT HC* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
116-117: *INCREDIBLE HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT #1* AND *#2* COVER INKS
118-119: *INCREDIBLE HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT #1* AND *#2* COVERS — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
120-125: *INCREDIBLE HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT #1* — WORDS BY PETER DAVID; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
126-127: *INCREDIBLE HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT #2* — WORDS BY PETER DAVID; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
128: *MARVEL SWIMSUIT SPECIAL (1992) #2*
129: *MARVEL SWIMSUIT SPECIAL (1992) #1*
MARVEL ILLUSTRATED: THE SWIMSUIT ISSUE (1991) #1
MARVEL HOLIDAY SPECIAL 1994 COVER
130: *AVENGERS (1998) #25* COVER
131: *AVENGERS (1998) #23* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
132: *AVENGERS LOG (1994)* COVER
134-135: *AVENGERS 30TH ANNIVERSARY POSTER* (REMASTERED VERSION FROM 2002) — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
136-137: *AVENGERS CORNER BOX* HEADSHOTS
138-139: *AVENGERS (1998) #1* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
140-141: *AVENGERS (1998) #1* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
142-143: *AVENGERS (1998) #1* PENCILS
144: *AVENGERS (1998) #2* COVER
AVENGERS: THE MORGAN CONQUEST TPB COVER
145: *AVENGERS (1998) #2* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
146: *AVENGERS (1998) #2* UNUSED COVER
147: *AVENGERS (1998) #2* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
AVENGERS (1998) #3 COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
148-150: *AVENGERS (1998) #3* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
151: *AVENGERS (1998) #4* — INKS BY AL VEY/BOB WIACEK; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
152-153: *AVENGERS (1998) #5* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
154-155: *AVENGERS (1998) #4* BOUND-IN POSTER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
156: *AVENGERS (1998) #5* COVER
AVENGERS (1998) #5 — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
157: *AVENGERS (1998) #6* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
158-161: *AVENGERS (1998) #10* COVER
AVENGERS (1998) #10 — INKS BY AL VEY/BOB WIACEK; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
162-163: *AVENGERS (1998) #12* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
164: *AVENGERS (1998) #12* — INKS BY AL VEY/BOB WIACEK; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
165: *AVENGERS (1998) #19* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH (TOP LEFT AND RIGHT)
AVENGERS (1998) #23 COVER
AVENGERS (1998) #23 — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
166-167: *AVENGERS (1998) #14* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
AVENGERS (1998) #14 — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
168-169: *AVENGERS (1998) #15* — INKS BY AL VEY/SCOTT KOBLISH; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
AVENGERS (1998) #19 AND *#22* COVERS — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
170: *AVENGERS (1998) #20* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
171: *AVENGERS (1998) #21* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
172-173: *AVENGERS (1998) #22* — WORDS BY KURT BUSIEK; INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH



174: *AVENGERS (1998) #8* — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
175: *AVENGERS (1998) #8* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
AVENGERS (1998) #15 — INKS BY AL VEY/SCOTT KOBLISH; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
176-177: *AVENGERS (1998) #30* — INKS BY SCOTT HANNA/AL VEY
AVENGERS (1998) #28 — INKS BY AL VEY; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
AVENGERS (1998) #29 COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
178: *WIZARD AVENGERS SPECIAL (1999)*
WIZARD (1991) #81 COVER
179: *AVENGERS (2018) #10* VARIANT COVER — COLORS BY JASON KEITH

180-181: *AVENGERS FINALE (2005) #1* — INKS BY MICHAEL PERKINS; COLORS BY BRIAN REBER
182: *JLA/AVENGERS COLLECTOR'S EDITION* BACK COVER
183: *JLA/AVENGERS (2003) #1* — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
184: *COMICS INTERVIEW (1983) #6* COVER
185-187: PENCILS FROM ABANDONED 1983 *JLA/AVENGERS* PROJECT
188-189: *JLA/AVENGERS (2003) #1* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
190-191: *JLA/AVENGERS (2003) #1*, *AVENGERS/JLA (2003) #2* AND *JLA/AVENGERS (2003) #3* — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
192-193: *JLA/AVENGERS (2003) #1* — COLORS BY TOM SMITH



194-195: *AVENGERS/JLA (2003) #2* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
196-197: *AVENGERS/JLA (2003) #2* — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
198-201: *JLA/AVENGERS (2003) #3* — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
202-203: *AVENGERS/JLA (2003) #4* — WORDS BY KURT BUSIEK; COLORS BY TOM SMITH
AVENGERS/JLA COMPENDIUM COVER
204: *JLA/AVENGERS (2003) #1* AND *AVENGERS/JLA (2003) #4* — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
205: *AVENGERS/JLA (2003) #4* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
206-207: *JLA/AVENGERS (2003) #3* COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH
208: *SPIDER-GEDDON (2018) #1* VARIANT COVER
209: *WOLVERINE: INFINITY WATCH (2019) #1* VARIANT COVER — COLORS BY DAVE MCCAIG
210: *PATSY WALKER, AKA HELLCAT! (2015) #1* VARIANT COVER — COLORS BY LAURA MARTIN
212-213: *AGE OF X-MAN ALPHA (2019) #1* VARIANT COVER — COLORS BY CHRIS SOTOMAYOR
214: *INFINITY WARS PRIME (2018) #1* VARIANT COVER
THANOS LEGACY (2018) #1 VARIANT COVER
215: *MAESTRO (2020) #1* AND *#2* VARIANT COVERS — COLORS BY JASON KEITH

217: *MARVEL COMICS (2019) #1000* — COLORS BY LAURA MARTIN
218: *SPIDER-WOMAN (2020) #7* VARIANT COVER — COLORS BY FRANK D'ARMATA
220: *WAR OF THE REALMS (2019) #1* VARIANT COVER — COLORS BY JASON KEITH
221: *POWERS OF X (2019) #1* AND *SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN (2019) #1* VARIANT COVERS — COLORS BY JASON KEITH
222: *ADVENTURES OF THE THING (1992) #3* — COLORS BY FRED MENDEZ
224: *AVENGERS (1998) #12* VARIANT COVER — COLORS BY TOM SMITH

QUOTES

29: *MARVEL MASTERWORKS FANTASTIC FOUR VOL 16* INTRODUCTION BY ROY THOMAS
35: *MARVEL MASTERWORKS INHUMANS VOL 2* INTRODUCTION BY DOUG MOENCH
37: *MARVEL MASTERWORKS FANTASTIC FOUR VOL 17* PREFACE BY ROY THOMAS
38: *AVENGERS VISIONARIES: GEORGE PÉREZ TPB* INTRODUCTION BY TOM BREVOORT



43: *MARVEL MASTERWORKS FANTASTIC FOUR VOL 17* INTRODUCTION BY LEN WEIN
50: *MARVEL MASTERWORKS AVENGERS VOL 15* INTRODUCTION BY STEVE ENGLEHART
57: *AVENGERS VISIONARIES: GEORGE PÉREZ TPB* INTRODUCTION BY TOM BREVOORT
60: *MARVEL MASTERWORKS AVENGERS VOL 17* INTRODUCTION BY ROGER STERN
62: *AVENGERS VISIONARIES: GEORGE PÉREZ TPB* INTRODUCTION BY TOM BREVOORT
77: *AVENGERS VISIONARIES: GEORGE PÉREZ TPB* INTRODUCTION BY TOM BREVOORT
120: *HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT TPB* INTRODUCTION BY PETER DAVID
125: *HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT TPB* INTRODUCTION BY PETER DAVID
127: *HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT TPB* INTRODUCTION BY PETER DAVID
213: *AVENGERS VISIONARIES: GEORGE PÉREZ TPB* INTRODUCTION BY TOM BREVOORT

AFTERWORD

BY RALPH MACCHIO



There's just nobody like him. George Pérez, I mean. As you could tell from this extraordinary collection of his mighty Marvel output through the decades, he is a man who thrives on aspects of comics artistry that intimidate so many others in the field. For example, his love of team books. George was the only choice to draw the ultimate group outing: *JLA/Avengers*, written by Kurt Busiek. It was a dream come true for Pérez, and his pulse-pounding pencils are a testament to that. George just can't draw enough characters to satisfy himself. And that goes for super villains as well as super heroes. Most pencilers would get groggy just thinking about the countless caped crusaders (and some without capes) he had to draw in that once-in-a-lifetime meeting of super-groups. He gets every costume detail and visual characteristic uncannily correct. He knows the nuances of how every Marvel character walks or flies or comports themselves in whatever situation they find themselves. No homogenous, rubber-stamped portrayals for our man. He zeroes in on what makes each character unique and then brings them to unbelievably vibrant life. And no one works harder to see that readers of his comics get their money's worth—in spades.

I'd first met the subject of this book up at the Marvel offices in the mid-1970s when we were both beginning our careers. George would come up during the week and show off his stunning pencils on the "Sons of the Tiger" martial arts series in our *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* black-and-white magazine. We staffers would ogle the pages, noticing how authentic the karate moves appeared and how George didn't skimp on drawing backgrounds replete with buildings consisting of countless bricks and windows. I still recall a wondrous page of the White Tiger crouched and ready to spring over an awesome urban landscape. Unbelievable! This immensely talented newcomer and I bonded over our love of the medium, although our backgrounds were quite different. George hailed from the mean streets of the Bronx, and I was a comfy suburbanite from northern New Jersey. He was the one you wanted at your back in a bar fight, though he had the sweetest disposition you could imagine. Early on, I interviewed George for a portfolio of his work called *Pérez: Accent on the First E*. I tape-recorded his responses to my questions for two hours until I realized, to my embarrassment, that I'd neglected to turn the recorder on. The sanguine Mr. P., being a true gentleman, agreed to do the entire interview over. Everything worked out, and we got a nice portfolio for his fans. One I'm proud of to this day.

"Pacesetter" Pérez progressed rapidly, and I was so fortunate to have been at Marvel to watch his meteoric rise. He had inspired runs on many of our top titles. His work with both Roy Thomas and Len Wein on *Fantastic Four* was superlative. Following in the artistic footsteps of such legends as Jack Kirby and John Buscema might have given pause to many pencilers. Not our George. He dug in and produced a body of work the envy of every artist in the field, including the breakup of the team and the introduction of a new passel of Pérez-designed baddies called Salem's Seven. He also sank his creative teeth into the *Avengers* several times with startling results. A slew of

classics emerged such as "The Korvac Saga" guest-starring the Guardians of the Galaxy we all fondly recall. But it was his later tenure with Kurt Busiek that secured George's place in the Avengers Hall of Fame. This came about during the "Heroes Return" initiative of the 1990s. It was a bit of serendipity that then-Editor in Chief Bob Harras had assigned me the role of locating new creators to take over several titles that would restart with new number one issues. George and I were speaking on the phone, and a reflective Mr. Pérez, though a triple-threat talent who could draw as well as ink and write, had come to the realization that his true legacy would rest on his penciling. He was looking for a series he could come on board to make his mark as never before. When I told him *Avengers* was up for grabs and Kurt Busiek was the probable writer, George was only too happy to assume the assignment. The rest, as the cliché goes, is history. The Busiek/Pérez collaboration was the stuff of legend. Issue after issue of the most compellingly rendered visuals of the Avengers, their Fifth Avenue mansion headquarters, and the super villains who opposed them, passed before our awestruck eyes. Every aspect of the Pérez wizardry was on full display. You can gaze at those pages as many times as you'd like and each time you'll discover something new clever ol' George put in there.

Because we were so close, George and I were able to work together on several happy occasions. When Mark Gruenwald and I were in the middle of our "Project Pegasus" epic in *Marvel Two-in-One*, we were able to persuade Garrulous George to pencil the final three supercharged issues, as well as stick around to draw the first two chapters of our "Serpent Crown Affair." Years later, the ever-questing Pérez and I joined forces on a multipart Black Widow espionage epic, co-plotted brilliantly by George. The completed story has been reprinted many times, much to my pleasure.

George Pérez has more than earned his place as a singular star in the Marvel firmament. His amazing artwork possesses a dynamism few pencilers can approach. Yet, he can also handle quiet, conversational scenes with enviable aplomb. When you want to know exactly how a Marvel character should look, it's to Pérez's rendition you'll turn. He pulls you deeply into this highly detailed world he creates with the magic wand that poses as his pencil. He possesses a sophisticated style uniquely his own; it owes allegiance to no artist who preceded him. And he has carved out a monumental body of work, a sampling of which we've been able to present here. It's been a privilege and pleasure to know George these many decades; to watch him hone and perfect the visual skills that have graced so many Marvel titles—both interiors and covers. Stay well, my valued friend. I sincerely hope you enjoyed the reminiscence as much as I did.

Ralph Macchio

Ralph Macchio spent over 35 years at Marvel, starting as an assistant editor and later writing Avengers, Thor and many others. As editor, he oversaw books across the Marvel line, including shepherding the Ultimate line into existence and editing all of Stephen King's Marvel adaptations.



“George was the first artist I became obsessive about... He was not just willing but ambitious to add more, to rise to every single challenge... He wanted to draw everything and everyone.” — ALEX ROSS

PÉREZ TRIUMPHANT!

George Pérez first wowed fans in the 1970s, quickly building his reputation as a natural-born storyteller. His powerfully detailed pencils graced the adventures of Man-Wolf, White Tiger, Black Widow and more — and he proved himself a super-team illustrator without peer on *Avengers* and *Fantastic Four*! Years later, Pérez wiped out half the Marvel Universe — along with Thanos — in *Infinity Gauntlet* and propelled the Hulk to a nightmarish *Future Imperfect* before ushering Earth’s Mightiest Heroes into a new era of greatness. Then, in the illustrator’s crowning achievement, he pitted the Avengers against DC’s JLA in the ultimate intercompany crossover — proving once and for all that nobody can draw an army of heroes in a single image better than George Pérez!

This volume features the finest artwork from throughout his Marvel career — together with extensive commentary from Pérez and those the illustrator has worked with and inspired!

